COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 61
2 OF 2

Tradition Versus Truth

STUDY GUIDE 2 OF 2:

Testing Every Doctrine by Scripture

An overview of proving doctrine through careful biblical examination.



Equipping and empowering for effective service
2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

Content

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION: HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT IS TRUE?

THE BEREAN STANDARD

REVISION: THE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

BEGIN WITH WHAT SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY SAYS

CONTEXT, AUDIENCE AND HISTORICAL SETTING

THE TIMEFRAME AND FULFILMENT MUST BE RESPECTED

SCRIPTURE MUST INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

CLEAR SCRIPTURE GUIDES DIFFICULT SCRIPTURE

DISTINGUISH STATEMENT, INFERENCE AND ASSUMPTION

TEST THE WHOLE TEACHING BY SCRIPTURE

ESTABLISH DOCTRINE FROM THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE

CONCLUSION: EVERY DOCTRINE MUST STAND THE TEST OF SCRIPTURE

MODULE CONCLUSION: TRADITION MUST YIELD TO THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

Contact and Links

Website: cogma.com.au

Email: admin@cogma.org.au

Radio COGMA: radiocogma.com

YouTube: youtube.com/@COGMAChannel

Facebook: facebook.com/profile.php?id=61585399471540

SEARCH THIS STUDY GUIDE

Windows: Ctrl + F | Mac: Cmd + F | Phone or tablet: use Search in your PDF reader.

PREFACE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous Study Guide established that tradition, popularity, age, sincerity and religious familiarity cannot determine truth. Every teaching must remain subject to the Word of God. This Study Guide now moves from that principle to the practical responsibility of testing doctrine carefully and establishing what Scripture actually teaches.

The believer is not called to accept teaching simply because it comes from a trusted minister, church, denomination or previous generation. Neither should a teaching be accepted simply because it is new, unusual or different from what most Christians believe. The same standard must be applied to every doctrine: Does it agree with the Word of God?

Paul instructed Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Rightly dividing the Word of truth requires careful study. We must examine the actual words of Scripture, consider the surrounding verses, recognise who is speaking and to whom, identify the timeframe, understand the circumstances and compare Scripture with Scripture. A conclusion should be formed from the evidence God has provided rather than from an answer decided beforehand.

These principles are not new to the COGMA student. In Study for Approval: How to Study God's Word, we learned practical methods for searching the Scriptures carefully. We considered the need for genuine interest and enquiry, diligent searching, asking the right questions, examining words, following context and harmony, identifying timeframe and audience, understanding the setting, using study aids wisely and applying what we learn.

Those principles will be briefly reviewed in this Study Guide. The purpose is not to teach the entire study method again, but to apply what has already been learned specifically to the testing of doctrine. The student should now be able to approach a doctrinal claim and ask not only whether it sounds biblical, but whether Scripture actually establishes it.

The believers at Berea provide the pattern. **Acts 17:11** says:

> *"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."*

They listened willingly, but they also examined what they heard. Their example shows that receiving teaching and testing teaching belong together.

This Study Guide will therefore help the student move from simply asking, *"Is this what I have been taught?"* to asking, *"Can this doctrine be established from Scripture?"* That question must govern every subject we study.

The purpose is not argument, suspicion or the pursuit of unusual ideas. The purpose is to know the truth God has revealed and to bring every belief into agreement with His Word.

Every doctrine must be tested by Scripture, and only what Scripture establishes should be held as truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a doctrinal conclusion come after examining the biblical evidence?

Personal Reflection

When an answer seems obvious because of earlier teaching, what helps you remain willing for the Bible to correct it?

Action Step

Choose one doctrinal claim you expect to be true, examine its supporting verses, and identify what you would change if the evidence requires it.

INTRODUCTION: HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT IS TRUE?

BACK TO CONTENTS

Every believer is surrounded by teaching. Some of it is sound, some of it is incomplete, and some of it is false. The important question is not simply whether a teaching sounds spiritual or has been accepted by many people, but whether it can be established from the Word of God.

The previous Study Guide showed how tradition can influence what people believe and how they read Scripture. This Study Guide now addresses the next responsibility: How do we test a doctrine carefully enough to know whether it is true?

Truth Must Be Established, Not Assumed

A doctrine should never be accepted simply because it is familiar. Neither should it be accepted because a teacher speaks confidently, because a church has taught it for many years or because a large number of Christians believe it.

The same principle applies to new or uncommon teaching. Something does not become true simply because it challenges tradition or appears to offer a fresh understanding.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**:

> *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

The instruction is clear. Teaching must be tested before it is held fast. The believer must learn to distinguish between what has been asserted, what has been inferred and what Scripture actually establishes.

The Bible Must Supply the Evidence

Sound doctrine must arise from Scripture. This means examining the actual words God has given, comparing related verses and allowing the wider testimony of Scripture to bring clarity.

A conclusion should not be built upon one isolated statement while ignoring other verses that address the same subject. Neither should an established interpretation be allowed to determine beforehand what a verse must mean.

Jesus said in **John 17:17**:

> *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."*

If God's Word is truth, then every doctrine must remain accountable to what He has revealed. Human explanation may help us understand, but human explanation can never become the final authority.

Testing Requires Careful Study

Testing doctrine requires more than finding a verse that appears to support a belief. The student must ask important questions: Who is speaking? Who is being addressed? What is happening? When does it occur?

The student must also ask what the surrounding verses establish and how the teaching harmonises with the rest of Scripture. These questions help prevent us from building doctrine upon assumption. They also help us recognise when an interpretation depends upon ideas that have been added rather than clearly established by God's Word.

Paul instructed Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Rightly dividing requires diligence. The serious student must be willing to search, compare, reconsider and allow Scripture to correct previous understanding.

The Berean Attitude

The believers at Berea provide one of the clearest examples of this responsibility. They listened with readiness, but they did not stop at listening.

Acts 17:11 says:

> *"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."*

They respected the message enough to examine it. Their confidence did not rest upon the reputation of the speaker but upon whether the teaching agreed with Scripture.

This is the attitude required throughout this Study Guide. We must be willing to test inherited beliefs, new ideas and our own conclusions by the same standard.

The question that will guide this study is therefore simple:

Can this doctrine be established from the Word of God?

If the answer is yes, it should be believed and held firmly. If the answer is no, no amount of tradition, popularity, sincerity or confidence can make it true.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What makes a doctrine established by the Bible different from a teaching that only sounds convincing?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever trusted a convincing explanation before checking its biblical foundation? What needs to change in the way you investigate?

Action Step

Select one doctrinal question, read the surrounding and related verses, and record any assumption that your investigation corrects.

THE BEREAN STANDARD

BACK TO CONTENTS

The believers at Berea provide one of the clearest biblical examples of how teaching should be received and examined. They listened willingly, but they did not accept teaching simply because it came from a respected messenger. They searched the Scriptures to determine whether what they had heard was true.

They Received the Word With Readiness

Luke records in **Acts 17:11**:

> *"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."*

The Bereans were ready to listen. They were not suspicious of everything they heard, nor did they reject teaching simply because it was new to them. Their willingness to receive the Word showed humility and a genuine desire to understand truth.

This is an important starting point for testing doctrine. A person who has already decided that every unfamiliar teaching must be wrong is not approaching Scripture fairly. We must be willing to listen before we judge while still keeping the Word of God as the final authority.

They Searched the Scriptures

The Bereans did more than listen. They searched the Scriptures for themselves. The word *"searched"* shows deliberate examination rather than casual reading.

They wanted to know whether the teaching agreed with what God had already revealed. Their confidence did not rest upon the reputation, intelligence or authority of the person speaking.

This principle remains essential. A sermon may be powerful, a teacher may be respected and an explanation may sound convincing, but every doctrine must still be examined by Scripture.

They Asked Whether Those Things Were So

The purpose of their search was specific. They wanted to know *"whether those things were so."* They were testing the claims they had heard.

This gives the Bible student an important question to carry into every study: Is this actually so according to Scripture?

That question should be asked when hearing familiar teaching and when hearing something unfamiliar. It should also be asked about beliefs we already hold strongly. The Berean standard does not apply only to other people's doctrines. It applies to our own understanding as well.

The Speaker Did Not Remove Their Responsibility

The teaching being examined at Berea came through Paul and Silas. Paul was an apostle, yet the Bereans were still commended for searching the Scriptures.

This demonstrates an important principle. The authority of a messenger does not remove the student's responsibility to examine what is being taught.

No pastor, teacher, denomination, author or ministry should expect people to accept doctrine without biblical examination. A faithful teacher should welcome careful study because truth does not need protection from honest investigation.

Readiness and Examination Belong Together

Some people are willing to listen but never test what they hear. Others become so suspicious of teaching that they refuse to listen openly. The Bereans avoided both extremes.

They *"received the word with all readiness of mind"* and they *"searched the scriptures daily."* Their openness did not remove discernment, and their examination did not remove willingness to learn.

This balance is important. We should not approach every teacher as though they are trying to deceive us, but neither should we surrender our responsibility to test doctrine.

Daily Searching Shows Diligence

Luke also records that the Bereans searched the Scriptures *"daily."* Their examination was not casual or occasional. They gave time and attention to determining whether what they had heard agreed with God's Word.

Sound doctrine often requires more than a quick glance at one verse. Related verses may need to be compared, the surrounding verses considered, important words examined and assumptions identified.

The Berean example therefore supports disciplined study. Truth deserves enough attention for us to examine it carefully.

The Standard Is Scripture, Not Agreement

The Bereans did not ask whether the teaching agreed with their traditions. They searched the Scriptures.

That distinction is central to this Study Guide. A doctrine may agree with what we have always believed and still need examination. Another doctrine may challenge what we have always believed and still deserve fair examination.

Agreement with us is not the standard. Agreement with Scripture is the standard.

Become a Berean Student

The Berean attitude should become a settled habit in every COGMA student. Listen carefully. Search honestly. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Ask whether the doctrine can actually be established from God's Word.

The goal is not to find reasons to reject teaching. Neither is the goal to find verses that protect what we already believe. The goal is to discover whether the teaching is true.

The Bereans were called *"more noble"* because they combined readiness with examination. That same standard must guide every student who desires to rightly divide the Word of truth.

Receive teaching with an open heart, search the Scriptures carefully, and believe what God's Word establishes.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do readiness to listen and daily searching belong together in the Berean example?

Personal Reflection

Do you tend to accept teaching too quickly or become defensive before hearing it? Which Berean habit do you need to strengthen?

Action Step

Make time to test one teaching you hear against the Bible, and practise both a willing spirit and a readiness to accept correction.

REVISION: THE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

The principles used to test doctrine have already been introduced in Study for Approval: How to Study God's Word. This section reviews those principles so that they can now be applied directly to doctrinal questions. The purpose is not to repeat the earlier teaching in full, but to bring the method back into view before using it throughout this Study Guide.

We Must Have an Interest

Careful study begins with a genuine desire to know what God has revealed. If we have little interest in truth, we are unlikely to give Scripture the time and attention required to examine doctrine properly. Our interest should arise from a desire to know Jesus Christ and understand His Word faithfully.

We Must Make a Genuine Enquiry

A genuine enquiry begins with an honest question rather than a predetermined answer. The student must be willing for Scripture to confirm, correct or completely change a previous understanding. We are not searching for support for what we already believe. We are searching for God's answer.

We Must Diligently Search the Scriptures

A quick search for one supporting verse is not enough to establish doctrine. The serious student searches carefully, compares related verses and continues until the wider testimony

of Scripture becomes clear. Diligent searching requires patience and a willingness to keep examining the evidence.

Ask the Right Questions

Good questions help us notice what might otherwise be overlooked. We should ask: Who? Why? Where? When? What? and How? These questions help identify the people involved, the purpose, the setting, the timeframe, the subject and the way the truth is being communicated.

Examine the Words

Every word of Scripture matters. Important words should be examined carefully, especially when their meaning affects doctrine. Dictionaries, concordances and original-language tools may assist, but the meaning of a word must still agree with its context and the wider harmony of Scripture.

Follow Context and Harmony

A verse must be understood within the verses around it, the subject being discussed and the wider teaching of Scripture. God's Word does not contradict itself. A sound conclusion should therefore harmonise with the whole testimony of Scripture rather than depend upon an isolated statement.

Examine the Timeframe

Time expressions must be taken seriously. Words such as *"now," "shortly," "at hand,"* and references to particular generations or appointed periods contribute to meaning. An established interpretation must never be allowed to move fulfilment away from the timeframe Scripture establishes.

Who Is Speaking, and to Whom?

The student must identify the speaker and the people being addressed. A command, promise, warning or prophecy given to particular people should first be understood within that setting. This protects us from applying words in ways that ignore the circumstances in which they were given.

Paint the Scene

We should understand what was happening when the words were spoken or written. Historical circumstances, location, customs and surrounding events may help explain why something was said and how the original hearers would have understood it.

Use Good Study Aids Wisely

Study aids can provide useful information, but they are not the authority. Dictionaries, concordances, maps, historical references and commentaries may assist our investigation, yet every conclusion must still be tested by Scripture.

How Often and How Long Should I Study?

Sound study requires regular attention rather than occasional effort. There is no single amount of time that suits every person, but doctrine should never be settled carelessly because we were unwilling to give the question enough time.

Putting the Method Together: A Step-by-Step Study

The individual principles work together. We begin with an honest question, search the Scriptures, examine the words, establish context, timeframe and audience, compare related verses and then form a conclusion from the evidence.

The conclusion comes at the end of the investigation, not at the beginning.

Apply What You Study

Bible study is not complete when we have reached an accurate conclusion. Truth must affect what we believe and how we live. When Scripture corrects an inherited belief, faithfulness requires us to accept that correction.

Worked Example: Matthew 12:32: Let the Method Lead to the Answer

The earlier Study Guide used **Matthew 12:32** to demonstrate why examining the words of Scripture matters. Jesus said that the sin against the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven *"neither in this world, neither in the world to come."* The important discovery was that the English word *"world"* can represent different Greek words.

KOSMOS can refer to the world or created order, while AION refers to an age or period. In **Matthew 12:32**, the word is AION. Jesus was therefore speaking of the age in which He and the Pharisees were living and the age that was to come.

This distinction can also be seen in **Hebrews 9:26**, where the King James Version uses the English word *"world"* twice while the Greek uses different words. In *"the foundation of the world,"* the word is KOSMOS. In *"the end of the world,"* the wording uses the plural of AION and speaks of the consummation or conclusion of the ages.

The verse does not teach that the physical world ended when Jesus Christ offered Himself. Within the wider teaching of Hebrews, His sacrifice belongs to the fulfilment of the former covenant order and the coming of the New Covenant reality.

This example demonstrates an important study principle: we must not assume that the same English word always carries the same meaning. Examining the actual word, timeframe, audience, surrounding verses and related Scriptures allows the Word of God to establish the conclusion.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the distinction between KOSMOS and AION show that context and word meaning must work together?

Personal Reflection

Have you formed a confident belief from one familiar English word without considering its meaning and setting? What have you learnt?

Action Step

Study **Matthew 12:32** *and its context, check the meaning of AION, and correct any conclusion you had drawn from the word 'world' alone.*

BEGIN WITH WHAT SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY SAYS

BACK TO CONTENTS

Testing doctrine must begin with a simple discipline: determine what Scripture actually says before deciding what it means. Many doctrinal errors develop because an interpretation is accepted so quickly that the student never stops to separate the words God gave from the explanation supplied by people.

Observe Before You Interpret

Careful study begins with observation. Before asking what a verse means, we should notice what it actually says. Important words, statements, relationships and time expressions should be identified before conclusions are formed.

This may seem obvious, yet familiar teaching can make observation difficult. When we have heard an explanation repeatedly, the mind may supply that explanation as soon as familiar verses are read. We can then assume that Scripture contains ideas that have actually come from previous teaching.

Jesus often directed attention to what had been written. He asked in **Luke 10:26**:

> *"He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?"*

The first question concerns what God has actually said. The second concerns how those words are being understood. Both questions are necessary because the words of Scripture remain unchanged while human understanding can be mistaken.

Do Not Add What Scripture Does Not State

A doctrine may include details that sound reasonable without those details being stated in Scripture. Once they have been repeated for many years, however, people may begin speaking about them as though God Himself revealed them.

The careful student must therefore ask: Is this detail actually stated? Is it established through the harmony of several verses? Or has it simply been assumed?

An idea should never be given the authority of Scripture simply because it helps a particular interpretation make sense. If something must be added before a doctrine can work, that addition needs careful examination.

This principle was demonstrated in the study of Daniel's seventy weeks. The prophecy gives seventy weeks, yet a widely taught interpretation inserts a period of thousands of years between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. The additional period does not appear in Daniel's prophecy. It is supplied by the interpretation.

What Scripture does not say must never be presented as though Scripture says it.

Notice Exactly What the Verse Says

Small details can have great importance. Singular and plural words, pronouns, connecting words, statements of time and the relationship between sentences may all contribute to understanding.

A student who reads hurriedly may overlook these details. A student who already expects a particular conclusion may also unconsciously minimise words that create difficulty for that conclusion.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of the actual wording of Scripture when He reasoned from a particular expression in **Matthew 22:31-32**:

> *"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

Jesus drew attention to what God had actually spoken. Careful doctrine therefore requires careful reading.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must observation of the Bible's actual words come before interpretation?

Personal Reflection

What familiar explanation do you tend to read into a verse before noticing its actual words? How could you change that habit?

Action Step

Read one familiar verse carefully, separate what it states from what you assumed, and revise your explanation wherever necessary.

Distinguish What Is Stated From What Is Concluded

A conclusion may be correct without being directly stated in one verse. Scripture frequently requires us to compare several verses and bring their testimony together. However, we should remain clear about the difference between what Scripture directly states and what we conclude from its wider testimony.

This distinction helps prevent assumptions from becoming doctrine. When explaining a belief, we should be able to show how the conclusion arises from Scripture rather than simply repeating the conclusion itself.

The stronger the doctrinal claim, the stronger the biblical evidence should be. Major doctrines should not rest upon uncertain implications, isolated expressions or assumptions that disappear when the surrounding verses are considered.

Read the Whole Statement

Individual words matter, but they must be understood within complete statements. A word should not be separated from the sentence in which it appears, and a verse should not be separated from the surrounding verses that establish its subject.

Sometimes a familiar phrase is quoted as though it stands alone. When the verses before and after it are examined, however, the writer may be discussing something very different from the doctrine for which the phrase is commonly used.

This is why careful observation naturally leads into context. First we identify what the words say. Then we examine how those words function within the surrounding verses and the wider portion of Scripture.

Let the Evidence Lead to the Conclusion

The proper order of study is important. We should not begin with a doctrine and then search for verses that can be made to support it. We should begin with Scripture, gather the evidence and allow that evidence to establish the conclusion.

Paul instructed Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."*

Scripture establishes doctrine, but it also provides correction. This means our understanding must remain open to change when the words of Scripture do not support what we previously believed.

A student who approaches Scripture only to defend an existing conclusion has stopped genuinely enquiring. The purpose of study is to discover God's answer, even when that answer requires us to reconsider something familiar.

Begin With Scripture and Remain With Scripture

Every doctrinal investigation should therefore begin by asking what Scripture actually says. Write down the important statements. Notice the words God chose. Identify what is clearly stated and what is not stated.

Resist the temptation to supply explanations before the biblical evidence has been examined. Then continue searching. Compare related verses, establish the context, identify the audience and timeframe, and test the developing conclusion against the wider testimony of God's Word.

This discipline protects the student from allowing tradition, imagination or established interpretations to supply what Scripture has not established.

Before asking whether a doctrine is familiar, popular or persuasive, ask first: What does Scripture actually say?

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can a sound conclusion be established by the Bible without being stated in one verse?

Personal Reflection

When several verses address your belief, are you willing for their combined witness to correct your first conclusion? Explain.

Action Step

Compare related verses on one belief, record what each establishes, and change any conclusion that depends on an unsupported assumption.

CONTEXT, AUDIENCE AND HISTORICAL SETTING

BACK TO CONTENTS

A doctrine should never be built from a verse without first understanding the setting in which the words were spoken or written. Context, audience and historical setting help the student recognise what is actually being addressed and prevent conclusions that ignore the circumstances God has recorded.

Context Establishes the Subject

Every verse belongs within a larger setting. The verses before and after it usually help identify the subject, the question being answered and the reason particular words were used.

A verse can be made to appear to teach almost anything when it is separated from the surrounding verses. Careful study therefore asks what is being discussed before the verse is quoted and whether the proposed interpretation agrees with the direction of the surrounding Scripture.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Rightly dividing requires more than locating a familiar phrase. The student must understand how that phrase functions within the complete thought being expressed.

Read Before and After the Verse

One of the simplest safeguards in Bible study is to read the surrounding verses. This often answers questions that appear difficult when a verse is considered alone.

The preceding verses may identify the people involved, the problem being addressed or the event under consideration. The following verses may explain the result, fulfilment or conclusion.

This is especially important when a familiar verse has been repeatedly quoted apart from its setting. A student should not assume that the commonly taught application is correct until the surrounding verses have been examined.

Identify Who Is Speaking

The Bible records the words of God, prophets, apostles, rulers, disciples, opponents and many others. The fact that words are faithfully recorded in Scripture does not mean that every speaker is expressing divine truth.

The student must therefore ask who is speaking. Is God speaking directly? Is Jesus speaking? Is an apostle giving instruction? Is an unbeliever making a claim? Is Scripture recording the words of someone whose understanding is incomplete or wrong?

This distinction can completely change how a verse should be understood. Scripture faithfully records what people said, but not everything spoken by every person becomes doctrine.

Identify Who Is Being Addressed

The student must also determine who is being spoken to. Jesus sometimes addressed His disciples, sometimes religious leaders, sometimes crowds and sometimes particular individuals. The New Testament letters were written to specific congregations or people facing particular circumstances.

A statement spoken to one audience should not automatically be transferred to another without considering why it was given.

For example, Jesus said in **Matthew 10:5-6**:

> *"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Those instructions were given to the twelve within a particular mission. The student must recognise the audience and circumstances before turning the instruction into a universal rule for all believers.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does identifying the speaker and audience protect us from a mistaken application of the Bible?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever applied a command to everyone without considering who originally received it? How does Jesus' instruction to the twelve correct that habit?

Action Step

Read **Matthew 10:5–6** *in context, identify its original audience, and reconsider one application you previously treated as universal.*

Historical Setting Helps Explain Meaning

Scripture records events within real historical circumstances. Political conditions, Jewish customs, Roman government, Temple worship, covenant expectations and local practices may all help explain why something was said or done.

Historical information must never replace Scripture, but it can help us understand circumstances that the original hearers already knew. A reliable historical reference may therefore provide useful background when it helps clarify what Scripture itself records.

The student must remain careful. Historical sources can contain error, and background information must never be allowed to overturn what Scripture clearly teaches.

Covenant Setting Also Matters

The Bible records events under different covenant arrangements. Words spoken under the Law of Moses must be understood within that setting before being applied to believers in Christ.

This is particularly important when studying practices, commandments and religious observances. Something may have been commanded under the Old Covenant without remaining a requirement after its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:16-17**:

> *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."*

The student must therefore ask not only who was speaking and to whom, but also what covenant setting surrounded the words being studied.

Do Not Remove Words From Their Original Setting

A common doctrinal error occurs when words are removed from their original setting and applied to a completely different subject. The words themselves may be quoted accurately, yet the interpretation can still be wrong because the original subject has been ignored.

This is why context cannot be treated as optional. The student should be able to explain how the doctrine being taught arises naturally from the surrounding verses and the subject being discussed.

If an interpretation requires us to abandon the original subject, audience or circumstances, the conclusion should be examined carefully.

Context Must Agree With the Wider Testimony of Scripture

Immediate context is essential, but it is not the only consideration. A verse must also harmonise with the wider testimony of Scripture.

Sometimes a statement becomes clearer when compared with another account of the same event or with other verses addressing the same doctrine. Scripture helps explain Scripture, but related verses must still be understood within their own settings.

This allows the student to form a fuller understanding without forcing unrelated verses together.

Ask the Basic Questions

Before reaching a doctrinal conclusion, the student should be able to answer several simple questions:

- Who is speaking?;
- Who is being addressed?;
- What subject is being discussed?;
- What happened before these words were spoken or written?;
- What follows afterwards?;
- What historical or covenant circumstances are important?

These questions often expose assumptions that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

Doctrine Must Arise From the Setting Scripture Gives

Context, audience and historical setting do not make Bible study unnecessarily complicated. They protect us from giving God's Word a meaning it was never intended to carry.

A verse should first be understood according to the subject, people and circumstances Scripture itself provides. Only then should we consider how the truth applies more broadly.

Sound doctrine respects the setting God gave. We must not remove words from their context, ignore the audience or disregard the circumstances in order to make Scripture support a conclusion already decided.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must historical and covenant setting remain part of the evidence for a doctrine?

Personal Reflection

Does an Old Covenant practice still influence what you think God requires of believers? How should its fulfilment in Christ guide you?

Action Step

Read **Colossians 2:16–17** *in context, identify one shadow fulfilled in Christ, and explain what should change in your understanding or practice.*

THE TIMEFRAME AND FULFILMENT MUST BE RESPECTED

BACK TO CONTENTS

Time is an important part of biblical interpretation. Scripture often tells us when something was happening, when something was expected to happen or how near an event was to the people who first heard the words. These statements must be respected rather than moved to another period because an established doctrine requires a different timeframe.

Time Words Carry Meaning

Words such as *"now," "soon," "shortly," "at hand," "this generation,"* and *"the last days"* are not meaningless additions to Scripture. They help establish when events, promises and warnings belong.

The student should therefore notice time expressions carefully. If Scripture gives an indication of nearness, the interpretation should begin by respecting that indication rather than immediately assuming that the fulfilment belongs thousands of years later.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:34**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*

Whatever subject is being studied, the words *"this generation"* must be included in the evidence. An established interpretation should not be allowed to redefine a clear time statement simply because its natural meaning creates difficulty for that interpretation.

Ask When the Words Were Spoken

The student should identify where the speaker and audience stood in biblical history. Were they living before Calvary, after the resurrection, before Pentecost or during the Gospel Day? Were they under the Old Covenant or the New Covenant?

These questions can greatly affect interpretation. Jesus often spoke while the Law covenant was still operating, yet He was approaching the fulfilment that would come through His death and the establishment of the New Covenant.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:4-5**:

> *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."*

Jesus came at an appointed time and entered a particular covenant setting. Doctrine must recognise where events and statements belong within God's unfolding purpose.

"At Hand" Should Mean Something

Scripture sometimes tells its original hearers that something was *"at hand."* That expression communicated nearness to them.

John the Baptist preached in **Matthew 3:2**:

> *"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Jesus likewise said in **Mark 1:15**:

> *"And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."*

The kingdom was not being presented as something belonging only to people living thousands of years later. The words *"the time is fulfilled"* and *"at hand"* placed the announcement within the generation hearing it.

This establishes an important study rule: when Scripture gives a timeframe, we should not move the fulfilment elsewhere without clear biblical reason.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must words such as 'at hand' retain their meaning for the original hearers?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever moved a promised event into the future because that is how you first heard it explained? What does 'at hand' challenge?

Action Step

Examine **Mark 1:15** *with the surrounding verses, identify its timeframe, and correct one expectation that disregards the words Jesus used.*

"Shortly" Must Also Be Considered

The same principle applies to statements of shortness or nearness. If something is said to happen shortly, the student should take that statement seriously.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:1**:

> *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:"*

The detailed interpretation of Revelation belongs in a future course, but the study principle can be recognised now. The word *"shortly"* forms part of what God revealed and must be considered when the prophecy is eventually studied.

We should not begin by assuming that such expressions have no real relationship to the people who first received them. The timeframe itself is part of the evidence.

Fulfilment Must Be Allowed to Close a Prophecy

Another important principle is recognising when Scripture declares something fulfilled. Once God has shown that a promise, prophecy or shadow has reached its fulfilment, the student should not reopen it and move its fulfilment into another period without clear biblical authority.

Jesus repeatedly spoke of fulfilment. He said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

Fulfilment means that what had been promised or foreshadowed reached its intended reality. The student must therefore distinguish between something still awaiting fulfilment and something Scripture identifies as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Do Not Create Gaps Without Biblical Evidence

An interpretation may sometimes require a prophecy to stop, leave a long unexplained interval and then resume in a distant period. Such a conclusion requires clear biblical evidence.

Daniel's seventy weeks provide an example already studied. The prophecy gives seventy weeks, yet a widely taught interpretation separates the seventieth week from the first sixty-nine by thousands of years. The gap is supplied by the interpretation rather than stated in Daniel's prophecy.

This does not mean that Scripture can never contain intervals between events. It means that an interval must be established by Scripture rather than inserted because an interpretation requires it.

Timeframe Must Work With Context and Harmony

Time statements should not be studied alone. They must be considered together with the speaker, audience, covenant setting, surrounding verses and related Scriptures.

A statement such as *"this generation"* may help establish the timeframe, while other verses explain what was expected within that generation. A reference to an age may become clearer when other Scriptures identify the covenant change connected with that age.

This is why the study method works as a whole. No single rule replaces the others. Timeframe, context, words, audience and harmony work together to establish a sound conclusion.

Let Scripture Establish When

The student should develop the habit of asking: When was this spoken? To whom was it spoken? Was the event described as near or distant? Does Scripture say that it was fulfilled? Does another verse identify the period more clearly?

These questions prevent us from moving events through history according to inherited expectations. They also help us recognise when traditional teaching has separated events from the timeframe God Himself provided.

Time is not an insignificant detail in Bible study. It is part of the revelation.

When Scripture tells us that something was near, belonged to a particular generation or had been fulfilled, we must allow God's Word to establish the timeframe rather than allowing tradition to move it elsewhere.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a gap in a prophecy be established by the Bible rather than supplied by an interpretation?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted a prophetic gap because it was familiar rather than because the Bible established it? What would change your view?

Action Step

Investigate one proposed prophetic interval in its setting, compare related verses, and revise any conclusion that requires an unsupported gap.

SCRIPTURE MUST INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

No doctrine should depend upon one isolated verse when other Scriptures address the same subject. God has given His Word as a complete and harmonious revelation, so one portion of Scripture can often clarify another. The careful student therefore compares verses rather than forming conclusions from a single statement considered alone.

The Bible Gives a Consistent Testimony

Scripture does not contradict Scripture. When two verses appear to disagree, the difficulty is usually in our understanding rather than in God's Word. We must therefore continue studying until the verses can be understood in harmony.

Jesus said in **John 10:35**:

> *"If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;"*

God's Word forms one consistent testimony. A sound doctrine should therefore agree with the wider teaching of Scripture rather than require some verses to be ignored, weakened or explained away.

One Verse May Not Give the Whole Picture

A single verse may state an important truth without giving every detail connected with that truth. Another verse may explain the circumstances, identify the timeframe or provide information that helps complete our understanding.

This is especially clear when the same event is recorded in more than one book of the Bible. One writer may include details that another does not mention, yet the accounts can be brought together without contradiction.

The student should therefore ask: What else does Scripture say about this subject? That question often leads to verses that confirm, explain or qualify an initial understanding.

Related Scriptures Provide Clarity

The earlier Study for Approval material referred to related verses as mate Scriptures. The idea is simple: one verse may help explain another because both address the same subject or truth.

This does not mean that any two verses containing similar words should automatically be joined together. They must genuinely relate to the same subject, and each must first be understood within its own context.

A mate Scripture should bring clarity rather than create a story that the verses themselves do not teach. Scripture interpreting Scripture requires careful comparison, not the careless joining of unrelated verses.

Jesus Used Scripture to Explain Scripture

Jesus frequently brought different Scriptures together when teaching truth. He understood each verse within the whole revelation of God rather than treating individual statements as isolated sayings.

After His resurrection, Jesus taught His disciples from several divisions of the Old Testament. He said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

The Law, the prophets and the psalms together bore witness concerning Him. Their combined testimony provided a fuller understanding of what God had revealed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do genuinely related verses clarify one another without losing their own contexts?

Personal Reflection

Have similar words ever caused you to combine verses about different subjects? What would make your comparisons more careful?

Action Step

Choose two verses on a related subject, establish each one's setting first, and correct any connection that their contexts do not support.

Clearer Scriptures Can Help Explain Difficult Verses

Some verses are easier to understand than others. When a difficult verse can be understood in several ways, clearer Scriptures addressing the same subject can help establish which understanding agrees with God's Word as a whole.

The student should not build a major doctrine upon an obscure expression while ignoring many clear verses that point in another direction. Difficult wording must remain accountable to the wider testimony of Scripture.

This principle requires patience. Instead of forcing an immediate answer from a difficult verse, we continue searching until related Scriptures provide greater clarity.

Repeated Biblical Testimony Strengthens Doctrine

When the same truth is established in several places, confidence in the doctrine becomes stronger. Repeated testimony shows that the conclusion does not depend upon one unusual expression or uncertain inference.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 13:1**:

> *"This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."*

Paul invoked the biblical principle of confirmed testimony. His immediate subject concerns his dealings with the Corinthians, so this verse should not be turned into a rule that every doctrine must have a fixed number of supporting verses.

The underlying principle nevertheless helps us recognise the value of confirmed testimony. When several clear Scriptures address the same truth, their combined witness can strengthen the conclusion and show that it has not been built upon an isolated expression.

Similar Words Do Not Always Mean the Same Subject

Care is necessary when comparing Scripture with Scripture. Two verses may use similar language while addressing different circumstances or subjects.

For example, words such as *"world," "coming," "kingdom," "day,"* or *"judgement"* may occur in several settings. The student must not assume that every occurrence automatically refers to the same event or period.

Context, audience and timeframe must still be considered. Scripture interpreting Scripture does not cancel the other principles of sound study. It works together with them.

Do Not Use One Verse to Cancel Another

Sometimes an established teaching places great emphasis upon one verse and then treats other verses as though they must somehow be made to fit that interpretation. This reverses the proper method.

No verse should be used to silence another. If several Scriptures appear to challenge our conclusion, we should reconsider the conclusion rather than dismiss the evidence.

The aim is harmony. A sound doctrine should allow the relevant Scriptures to stand together without forcing some of them to mean something unnatural.

Compare Before You Conclude

Before accepting a doctrinal interpretation, gather the Scriptures that clearly address the subject. Read each within its context, identify the speaker and audience, examine important words and note any timeframe given.

Then compare them. What truth do they share? Does one clarify another? Are there apparent differences that need further examination? Does the proposed doctrine account honestly for all of the biblical evidence?

This method is slower than finding one verse that appears to prove a point, but it is much safer. Doctrine should be established by the harmony of God's Word rather than by selective quotation.

Let the Whole Word of God Speak

Scripture interpreting Scripture protects the student from private imagination and inherited assumptions. It requires us to listen to more than the verses that initially appear to support what we believe.

The result should be a doctrine that fits naturally within the wider revelation of God. The student is not trying to make every verse support a preferred interpretation but allowing the combined testimony of Scripture to shape the doctrinal conclusion.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:10**:

> *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"*

These words should themselves be understood within their own context. They should not be used as though Isaiah were directly giving a method for assembling doctrine from scattered

verses. The principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture must instead be established by allowing related Scriptures to clarify one another while each remains within its proper context.

This is itself an example of the method we are learning. We must not take a familiar biblical expression and give it a purpose that its setting does not establish.

A doctrine should never depend upon isolating one verse from the rest of God's Word. Scripture must interpret Scripture, and the whole testimony of the Bible must be allowed to establish what is true.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should no verse be used to silence another verse about the same truth?

Personal Reflection

When other verses challenge a belief you prefer, are you tempted to dismiss them? How can you remain willing to be corrected?

Action Step

Gather the relevant verses for one belief, including evidence against your first view, and explain any adjustment needed in your understanding.

CLEAR SCRIPTURE GUIDES DIFFICULT SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Some verses are easier to understand than others. Certain statements are direct and unmistakable, while others may contain symbolic language, unfamiliar expressions or details that require careful examination. When a difficult verse can be understood in more than one way, clearer Scriptures should help guide the interpretation.

Begin With What Is Clear

The student should begin with truths that Scripture states plainly. Clear teaching provides a firm foundation from which more difficult verses can be examined.

This does not mean that difficult Scriptures are unimportant. It means that an uncertain interpretation should not be allowed to overturn teaching that is repeatedly and clearly established elsewhere in God's Word.

For example, if many clear verses establish a doctrine and one difficult verse appears to contradict them, the first response should not be to discard the clear teaching. The difficult verse should be examined more carefully until it can be understood in harmony with the wider testimony of Scripture.

Difficult Wording Requires Care

Some difficulty arises because language, customs or circumstances are unfamiliar to modern readers. Other verses may use figures, symbols or prophetic expressions that should not be interpreted as though every word were literal.

Peter acknowledged that some of Paul's writings contained things that were difficult to understand. He wrote in **2 Peter 3:15-16**:

> *"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."*

Difficulty does not mean contradiction. It means the student must study carefully and resist reaching a conclusion before the evidence has been gathered.

Do Not Build Major Doctrine Upon an Uncertain Expression

A major doctrine should not rest upon one expression whose meaning is uncertain. If several understandings are possible, related Scriptures should be examined before one conclusion is reached.

This principle becomes especially important when an interpretation conflicts with many clearer verses. The student should ask whether the difficult statement has been given too much weight because it appears to support an inherited teaching.

One uncertain verse should never be used to silence the clear testimony of many Scriptures.

Clear Teaching Provides Boundaries

Clear Scriptures help establish boundaries for interpretation. They show what an unclear verse cannot mean if that meaning would directly contradict what God has plainly revealed elsewhere.

Jesus said in **John 10:30**:

> *"I and my Father are one."*

Other Scriptures identify Jesus Christ as the visible revelation of the invisible God and declare that all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him. A difficult verse concerning Father and Son must therefore be understood in harmony with the clear biblical testimony concerning the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ. It must not be used to divide God into separate divine persons.

The same principle applies to every doctrine. Clear revelation should guide the interpretation of wording that is less immediately understood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should clear biblical teaching guide the understanding of a difficult expression?

Personal Reflection

Does the clear testimony that Jesus Christ is the one true God govern your reading of difficult verses about Father and Son? Explain.

Action Step

Compare **John 10:30** *with related clear verses, and state how your understanding must honour both His genuine humanity and His full Deity.*

Symbolic Scripture Must Be Compared With Clear Scripture

Symbolic language especially requires this discipline. A symbol may represent something very different from its literal appearance.

The Bible itself often provides the meaning of its symbols. A student should therefore search for clear Scriptures that explain how a particular image or expression is used elsewhere.

This will become especially important when studying Revelation. The future Revelation course will require careful attention to symbols, but those symbols should never be interpreted according to imagination or modern events alone. Scripture must provide the controlling meaning.

Do Not Prefer the Difficult Verse Because It Supports Tradition

Tradition can cause students to give unusual importance to one difficult verse because it appears to support an established doctrine. Clear verses pointing in another direction may then be weakened or explained away.

This is not sound study. The student must be willing to give clear biblical teaching its proper weight, even when doing so challenges a familiar interpretation.

A teaching should not be preserved by depending upon obscure wording while repeatedly resisting clearer Scripture.

The Clearer Scripture Must Address the Same Subject

Care is also required when applying this principle. A verse is not automatically clearer simply because its wording is easier to understand. The Scriptures being compared must genuinely address the same doctrine or subject.

A clear verse about one matter cannot simply be used to settle an unrelated question. Context, audience and timeframe must still be examined.

The goal is not to collect easy verses and ignore difficult ones. The goal is to understand every verse within the harmony of God's Word.

Difficult Scripture Should Fit the Whole

A sound interpretation should allow both clear and difficult verses to stand together. We should not have to dismiss one group in order to preserve another.

Sometimes this requires further study. The answer may not become immediately obvious, and the student should be willing to leave a question open rather than force a conclusion.

There is no weakness in saying that more study is required. It is better to remain careful than to establish doctrine upon uncertainty.

Let Clear Truth Guide the Search

When a difficult verse is encountered, the student should ask several questions: What does Scripture clearly teach about this subject? Are there other verses addressing the same issue? Does the proposed interpretation contradict anything God has already established plainly?

The difficult verse should then be examined within its context, audience, timeframe and relationship to the wider Scriptures. This protects the student from building doctrine upon one uncertain expression while overlooking the clear testimony God has provided.

Clear Scripture should guide the understanding of difficult Scripture. No uncertain interpretation should be allowed to overturn what the Word of God has plainly and repeatedly established.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is admitting that further study is needed better than forcing an answer from an uncertain verse?

Personal Reflection

Which difficult question are you tempted to settle before the biblical evidence is sufficient? What would patient honesty look like?

Action Step

Identify one difficult subject, write down what the Bible clearly establishes, and leave unsupported details open rather than insisting on an answer.

DISTINGUISH STATEMENT, INFERENCE AND ASSUMPTION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Sound doctrine requires the student to distinguish carefully between what Scripture directly states, what may reasonably be inferred from Scripture and what has been assumed. When these categories are confused, human reasoning can gradually acquire the authority of God's Word.

What Scripture Directly States

A direct statement is something Scripture actually says. It may be a command, declaration, promise, warning, historical fact or doctrinal truth stated clearly in the words God has given.

For example, **John 1:1** says:

> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

The statement *"the Word was God"* is explicit. The student does not need to construct an argument before recognising that Scripture directly declares it.

Direct statements provide a strong foundation for doctrine. They should be identified carefully before further conclusions are drawn.

What Scripture Establishes by Inference

Not every biblical truth is expressed in one sentence. Sometimes several Scriptures must be brought together before the full conclusion becomes clear.

An inference is a conclusion drawn from evidence Scripture provides. A sound inference must arise naturally from the words of Scripture and agree with the wider testimony of God's Word.

Jesus Himself demonstrated this kind of reasoning when speaking about the resurrection. He referred to God's words concerning Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then drew a conclusion from them.

Jesus said in **Matthew 22:31-32**:

> *"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

The conclusion arose from what God had said. It was not an idea introduced independently of Scripture.

What Is Assumed

An assumption is different. It is an idea accepted without sufficient biblical evidence.

An assumption may sound reasonable. It may fit an existing interpretation or explain how someone thinks several verses should relate to one another. Yet if Scripture does not state it or establish it through its wider testimony, it must not be treated as revealed truth.

This is where tradition can become especially influential. An assumption may be repeated so often that people eventually forget that it began as an interpretation.

The student must therefore ask: Where does Scripture actually establish this idea? If the answer cannot be shown, the teaching should not be presented with the authority of God's Word.

Inference Must Not Be Presented as Direct Statement

A sound inference may be completely valid, but it should still be recognised for what it is. There is an important difference between saying, *"Scripture states"* and saying, *"These Scriptures establish"* or *"These verses lead us to conclude."*

This distinction protects both the teacher and the student. It prevents our explanation from becoming confused with the inspired words themselves.

The stronger the inference, the more clearly its biblical foundation should be demonstrated. A conclusion supported by several harmonious Scriptures is very different from one resting upon a chain of uncertain possibilities.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What distinguishes a direct statement, a sound inference and an unsupported assumption?

Personal Reflection

Have you sometimes described your own inference as though the Bible stated it directly? Why does this distinction matter?

Action Step

Examine one teaching, identify direct statements, reasoned conclusions and assumptions, and correct the way you explain its certainty.

Assumptions Can Become Foundations

One assumption can sometimes support an entire chain of teaching. Other conclusions are then built upon it, and eventually the teaching appears strong because its conclusions seem to support one another.

The real question, however, is whether the original assumption was ever established by Scripture. If the foundation has not been established, the conclusions built upon it must also be examined.

Daniel's seventy weeks provide a clear example. Once a gap of thousands of years is assumed between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, other doctrines can be placed within that supposed period. If the gap itself is not established by Daniel's prophecy, conclusions depending upon it must also be reconsidered.

This demonstrates why foundational assumptions must be examined first.

Do Not Confuse Possibility With Proof

A teaching may be possible without being proven. The fact that Scripture could be understood in a particular way does not mean that the interpretation has been established.

The student should therefore be careful with statements such as *"It could mean," "perhaps,"* or *"It is possible that."* Such possibilities may be considered during investigation, but they do not establish doctrine.

Possibility is not proof. A conclusion should be accepted as doctrine only when Scripture provides sufficient evidence to establish it.

Ask Where Each Idea Comes From

When examining doctrine, it can be helpful to separate the teaching into individual claims. For each claim, ask:

- Is this directly stated in Scripture?;
- Is it established by comparing several Scriptures?;
- Is it a reasonable inference from the biblical evidence?;
- Or has it simply been assumed?

This method can expose where a doctrine moves from biblical evidence into human explanation. It also helps the student remain fair.

Not every inference is wrong, and not every assumption is deliberately deceptive. The purpose is to identify which ideas have been established by Scripture and which still require biblical proof.

Teachers Must Speak Carefully

Those who teach God's Word have a responsibility not to give their own conclusions greater authority than Scripture gives them. We should not say *"the Bible says"* when the Bible does not actually say it.

James warned in **James 3:1**:

> *"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."*

Teaching carries responsibility. Careful language helps prevent personal interpretation from being presented as divine revelation.

Let Scripture Establish the Conclusion

The goal is not to eliminate reasoning from Bible study. God expects us to read, compare, consider and understand His Word. The danger arises when our reasoning moves beyond the evidence and the resulting assumption is then treated as doctrine.

The student must therefore keep returning to the same question:

What has God actually revealed?

Direct statements should be received. Sound conclusions should be established from the harmony of Scripture. Assumptions must remain assumptions until biblical evidence establishes them.

Do not allow what has been inferred or assumed to carry the same authority as what Scripture actually establishes.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can a possible interpretation not be treated as a proven doctrine?

Personal Reflection

Have you defended a possible explanation without establishing its foundation? How would you respond if that foundation proved unsound?

Action Step

Test the first claim underlying one belief, and revise or set aside the conclusions that cannot stand without it.

TEST THE WHOLE TEACHING BY SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

A teaching may involve more than one conclusion. One belief may depend upon another, and several ideas may be joined together until they form a complete explanation of a subject. When testing teaching, the student must therefore examine not only the final claim but also the foundations and assumptions upon which that claim depends.

Christianity is not simply a collection of doctrines to be organised and defended. It is the life of Jesus Christ within the believer. Sound teaching matters because it helps us know Christ, understand His truth and live faithfully by His life within us.

Teachings Can Depend Upon Other Teachings

Some teachings are built through several connected conclusions. One interpretation leads to another, and that conclusion may then become the foundation for something further.

This can make a teaching appear strong because its individual parts seem to support one another. Yet the real strength of the teaching depends upon whether those parts are established by Scripture.

If an important assumption is wrong, conclusions depending upon that assumption must also be reconsidered. The student must therefore look beneath the final teaching and ask how it was reached.

Begin With the Foundation

Every teaching has a foundation. The first responsibility is to identify what must be true before the rest of the teaching can stand.

Jesus spoke about the importance of a sound foundation in **Matthew 7:24-25**:

> *"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."*

The immediate teaching concerns hearing and doing the words of Jesus, but the principle is clear. What is built must rest upon a secure foundation.

In Bible study, that foundation must be what God has revealed. An assumption cannot carry the same authority as Scripture.

Test Each Step Carefully

Some teachings involve a chain of reasoning. The student should examine each step rather than looking only at the final conclusion.

Does the first conclusion actually follow from Scripture? Does the next claim depend upon that conclusion? Has anything been added that Scripture does not establish?

If one step depends upon an unsupported assumption, everything built upon that step must be tested again. The purpose is not to make Bible study unnecessarily complicated. It is to ensure that human reasoning has not quietly entered the teaching and then been presented as though God Himself had spoken it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the foundation of a chain of teaching be tested before its final conclusion?

Personal Reflection

How has the example of an inserted prophetic gap challenged the way you defend a chain of teaching?

Action Step

Trace one connected teaching back to its first claim, check the biblical evidence, and explain what you will reconsider if that claim fails.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks Show Why Foundations Matter

Daniel's seventy weeks provide a clear example. The prophecy gives seventy weeks, yet a widely accepted interpretation places a gap of thousands of years between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks.

Once that gap is accepted, further teachings can be connected with it. The seventieth week can be moved into the future, and other prophetic events can then be attached to that future period.

The first question must therefore be about the foundation: Does Daniel's prophecy establish the gap?

If the gap itself is not stated or established by Scripture, then teachings that depend upon it must be re-examined. They cannot be protected simply because they have become familiar through repeated teaching.

When a foundational assumption is shown to be wrong, every conclusion depending upon that assumption must be tested again.

Do Not Protect a Teaching From Scripture

Once a person has believed something for many years, there can be a temptation to defend it whenever Scripture raises difficulties. Verses supporting the teaching may be emphasised while verses that challenge it are given less attention.

This reverses the proper order. Scripture must be allowed to correct the teaching.

The student should ask whether all the relevant biblical evidence can be accepted naturally. Can the words of Scripture retain their normal meaning? Can the stated timeframe be respected? Can the original audience and circumstances be acknowledged without weakening the teaching?

If a belief can survive only by repeatedly changing the natural meaning of Scripture, the belief itself needs examination.

Test the Conclusion Against the Whole Word of God

A conclusion must agree with the wider testimony of Scripture. One group of verses should not be used to establish something that contradicts what God's Word clearly teaches elsewhere.

Paul said in **Acts 20:27**:

> *"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."*

The whole counsel of God matters. A teaching must fit within the complete revelation God has given.

This is especially important because truth is centred in Jesus Christ. Our conclusions must agree with who He is, what He accomplished and the life He now lives within His people. Teaching that moves us away from Christ rather than towards a clearer understanding of Him requires careful examination.

A Familiar Teaching Can Still Be Wrong

A belief may have been taught for centuries, preached by respected ministers and accepted by large numbers of Christians. None of these things establishes its truth.

At the same time, finding one weakness in a teaching does not mean everything associated with it is false. Each claim should be examined fairly.

The student is not looking for reasons to reject what others believe. The student is looking for the truth of God's Word.

Our Own Understanding Must Also Be Tested

It is much easier to identify assumptions in someone else's teaching than in our own. We must therefore apply the same standard to ourselves.

If we teach something, we should be able to show how Scripture establishes it. If Scripture corrects our understanding, we must be willing to change.

This protects us from replacing inherited tradition with personal opinion. The authority remains with God's Word, not with us.

Truth Must Produce Life in Christ

Correct understanding is important, but Bible study is not simply an intellectual exercise. Jesus Christ is the truth, and truth should lead us into a faithful life in Him.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

The purpose of testing teaching is therefore not to win arguments or prove that others are wrong. We want to know Christ more clearly, understand His Word faithfully and allow His life within us to govern how we live.

Sound teaching should strengthen faith, correct error and bring the believer into greater agreement with Jesus Christ and His life within.

Let Scripture Test the Whole Teaching

When examining a teaching, do not stop after finding one supporting verse. Examine how the teaching is built.

What is its foundation? Which ideas are directly stated in Scripture? Which conclusions are drawn from several verses? Are any assumptions necessary for the teaching to work? Does the conclusion harmonise with the whole Word of God?

These questions help the student distinguish between something Scripture truly establishes and something that has gradually developed through human explanation.

Every teaching must arise from Scripture, remain subject to Scripture and lead us into a clearer understanding of Jesus Christ and the life we have in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must sound teaching lead to knowing Jesus Christ and living by His life within?

Personal Reflection

When someone teaches something you believe is wrong, do you focus on winning an argument or helping them see Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Test one conclusion of your own with the same care you expect from others, and choose a humble, Christ-centred way to express any correction.

ESTABLISH DOCTRINE FROM THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Sound doctrine should never depend upon one isolated verse, one unusual expression or one interpretation that conflicts with the wider Word of God. Truth must be established from the harmony of Scripture, allowing the whole biblical witness to speak together.

God's Word Is Harmonious

Scripture comes from God, and therefore its truth is consistent. When correctly understood, one portion of Scripture will not contradict another.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:16**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"*

Because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, doctrine should be formed from the whole counsel of what He has revealed. We should not build teaching from selected verses while ignoring other Scriptures that address the same subject.

Harmony requires us to gather the relevant evidence and allow that evidence to stand together.

One Verse May Give Only Part of the Picture

A verse may state something completely true while not giving every detail concerning the subject. Another verse may provide information that helps explain the first.

This is why comparing Scripture with Scripture is essential. The student should not assume that one statement contains everything God has revealed about a doctrine.

For example, one Gospel writer may record one detail of an event while another includes additional information. The accounts do not compete with one another. Together they provide a fuller understanding.

The same principle applies to doctrine. We search for the complete biblical witness.

Gather the Relevant Scriptures

Before reaching a conclusion, the student should gather the verses that clearly address the subject being studied. These may come from different books of the Bible, but each must first be understood within its own setting.

The purpose is not to collect as many verses as possible. It is to identify the Scriptures that genuinely speak to the question being examined.

The student should then ask what those verses have in common. Do they confirm the same truth? Does one explain another? Does one establish a timeframe or audience that helps clarify the others?

This process allows doctrine to develop from the evidence rather than from selective quotation.

Harmony Does Not Mean Forcing Agreement

The student must be careful not to create artificial harmony. Scripture should not be made to agree with a conclusion already decided.

If two verses appear difficult to reconcile, the answer is not to change the natural meaning of one simply to protect our interpretation. We should continue examining context, wording, audience and timeframe until the reason for the apparent difficulty becomes clearer.

Sometimes the correct response is to admit that further study is required. Honest uncertainty is better than forcing Scripture to support a conclusion that the evidence has not established.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can related Scriptures form a fuller witness without being forced to agree?

Personal Reflection

Are you willing to consider verses that challenge a conclusion you have already reached? What attitude must govern your study?

Action Step

Investigate one doctrinal question using verses for and against your first view, and revise your conclusion wherever the full biblical witness requires it.

Repeated Testimony Gives Confidence

When several Scriptures independently establish the same truth, the student can have greater confidence in the conclusion.

Jesus said in **John 8:17**:

> *"It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true."*

Jesus was referring to the biblical principle of confirmed testimony. In doctrinal study, repeated biblical witness can likewise strengthen our confidence that a teaching does not depend upon one uncertain interpretation.

This does not mean that every doctrine must have a particular number of supporting verses. It means that where Scripture provides repeated testimony concerning the same truth, that testimony should be given its proper weight.

Clear Truth Should Govern the Conclusion

The wider harmony of Scripture also protects us from allowing difficult wording to overturn clear biblical teaching. If many verses plainly establish a truth, an uncertain interpretation of another verse should not be permitted to contradict them.

The student should therefore ask whether the proposed doctrine fits naturally with what God has clearly revealed elsewhere. If our interpretation repeatedly conflicts with clear Scriptures, the problem may not be with those verses. Our interpretation may need correction.

Doctrine Must Centre in Jesus Christ

The harmony of Scripture ultimately leads us to Jesus Christ. The Bible does not present disconnected religious ideas. It reveals God's purpose fulfilled in Christ.

Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The Scriptures testify of Jesus Christ. Sound doctrine should therefore bring the student into a clearer understanding of who Jesus is, what He has accomplished and the life He lives within His people.

A teaching that weakens the completeness of Christ's work or moves attention away from Him should be examined carefully. The harmony of Scripture consistently reveals Jesus Christ as central.

Doctrine Must Agree With the Completed Work of Christ

The believer should also examine whether a teaching agrees with what Scripture reveals concerning the completed work of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The believer is complete in Jesus Christ. Teaching should therefore be examined in the light of that completeness.

If a doctrine suggests that something remains spiritually lacking after the new birth, requires another spiritual experience to complete salvation or makes human religious practice necessary to complete what Christ has already accomplished, it must be tested carefully against the wider testimony of Scripture.

Complete means complete.

Doctrine Must Lead to Faithful Living

Biblical doctrine is not simply information to be stored in the mind. Truth should shape how the believer lives because Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer and His life is to be expressed through us.

Paul wrote in **Titus 2:10**:

> *"Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."*

Sound doctrine and faithful living belong together. The truth we understand should be seen in our conduct because the life of Jesus Christ is within us.

The goal is therefore not simply to reach correct conclusions. It is to know the truth and live according to the life of Christ within.

Allow the Whole Word of God to Decide

When testing a doctrine, the student should ask whether all the relevant Scriptures can stand together naturally. Does the conclusion agree with clear teaching? Does it respect context, audience and timeframe? Does it require assumptions Scripture does not establish?

The student should also ask whether the conclusion agrees with the completed work of Jesus Christ and fits the wider revelation of God's Word. When these questions are answered carefully, doctrine can be established with confidence.

The student should not seek a verse that appears to prove a preferred belief. We should seek the whole biblical witness.

Sound doctrine is established when the relevant Scriptures stand together in harmony and lead us to the truth God has revealed in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must doctrine agree with the completed work of Christ and the believer's completeness in Him?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever thought that another experience or religious practice was needed to complete what Christ has given at the new birth?

Action Step

Read **Colossians 2:10** *with related verses, reject any expectation of incomplete salvation, and describe one choice governed by Christ's indwelling life.*

CONCLUSION: EVERY DOCTRINE MUST STAND THE TEST OF SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

This Study Guide has established a practical responsibility for every believer: doctrine must be tested by the Word of God. We must not accept teaching simply because it is familiar, widely believed, sincerely presented or supported by respected people. Neither should we accept something simply because it is new or different.

Testing Doctrine Requires Careful Study

The Bereans provide the pattern. They received teaching willingly, but they searched the Scriptures to determine whether what they had heard was true.

That same attitude must guide us. We begin with what Scripture actually says, examine the words carefully, identify the speaker and audience, respect the historical and covenant setting, recognise the timeframe and compare related Scriptures.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**:

> *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

Testing is not unbelief. It is part of faithful obedience to God.

Assumptions Must Be Exposed

One of the greatest dangers in doctrine is allowing an assumption to become accepted as though Scripture clearly teaches it. An idea may be repeated for generations until people no longer recognise that it was originally supplied by interpretation.

The student must therefore distinguish between what Scripture directly states, what Scripture establishes through the harmony of several verses and what has been assumed.

Daniel's seventy weeks have shown why this matters. When a gap of thousands of years is inserted into the prophecy, further teachings can be built upon that assumption. If the foundation is not established by Scripture, everything depending upon it must be examined again.

The Whole Word of God Must Agree

Sound doctrine does not depend upon isolated verses. The relevant Scriptures should stand together in harmony.

A conclusion must respect context, audience, timeframe and clear biblical teaching. Difficult verses should be understood in harmony with clearer Scriptures, and no teaching should require us to ignore or weaken evidence that challenges it.

Jesus said in **John 17:17**:

> *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."*

The final authority is not our tradition, our teacher or our own reasoning. The final authority is God's Word.

Truth Must Lead Us to Jesus Christ

The purpose of testing doctrine is not simply to become skilled at identifying error. Truth must lead us into a clearer knowledge of Jesus Christ and into faithful living by His life within us.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Correct doctrine matters because it reveals Jesus Christ correctly. When our understanding is brought into agreement with Scripture, we are better prepared to know Him, trust Him and live according to His life within us.

Hold Fast What Scripture Establishes

The serious Bible student remains teachable. We should be willing to reconsider inherited beliefs, but we should also be willing to stand firmly when Scripture has clearly established the truth.

The goal is not uncertainty. The goal is confidence grounded in God's Word rather than confidence grounded in tradition or assumption.

Every doctrine must therefore face the same questions: What does Scripture actually say? What do the surrounding verses establish? Who is speaking and to whom? What timeframe is given? Does the conclusion agree with the wider testimony of Scripture?

When those questions are answered carefully, the student can hold what Scripture establishes with confidence.

Every doctrine must stand the test of Scripture, because only the Word of God has authority to determine what we believe.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do careful testing and confident acceptance of established truth belong together?

Personal Reflection

Has careful Bible study made you more teachable and faithful to Christ, or mainly more confident in correcting others? Explain.

Action Step

Identify one established truth, name the attitude or conduct it addresses, and act on it through the life of Jesus Christ within you.

MODULE CONCLUSION: TRADITION MUST YIELD TO THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

BACK TO CONTENTS

This module has brought together two responsibilities that belong to every serious student of Scripture. First, we must recognise that tradition can influence what we believe and how we understand God's Word. Second, every doctrine must be tested carefully by Scripture before it is accepted as truth.

Tradition Cannot Determine Truth

Study Guide 60 showed that tradition may become powerful through repetition, age, popularity, sincerity, culture and religious identity. A teaching can become deeply established without ever being properly examined.

This is why familiarity must never be confused with biblical authority. What we have always been taught may be true, but it must still be tested.

Jesus warned in **Mark 7:13**:

> *"Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."*

Tradition becomes dangerous when it is protected from correction and allowed to stand above what God has revealed.

Every Teaching Must Be Tested

Study Guide 61 has shown how doctrine should be examined. We begin with what Scripture actually says, recognise the context, identify the speaker and audience, establish the timeframe, examine important words and compare related Scriptures.

We must also distinguish between direct biblical statements, sound conclusions and unsupported assumptions. A teaching should not be accepted because it fits a familiar explanation. It must be established by the Word of God.

The Bereans provide the continuing pattern. **Acts 17:11** says:

> *"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."*

They listened with readiness and examined what they heard. Both attitudes are necessary.

Truth Must Correct Us

The purpose of testing doctrine is not simply to expose the errors of others. The same standard must be applied to our own understanding.

We must remain willing for Scripture to correct what we believe. This requires humility because some beliefs may have been held for many years and may be connected with people we respect.

Correction should not be feared. When God's Word changes our understanding, we are being brought into closer agreement with truth.

Jesus Christ Must Remain Central

The goal of Bible study is not the accumulation of arguments or theological information. Scripture reveals Jesus Christ, and truth should lead us into a clearer knowledge of Him and a faithful life through His indwelling presence.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Correct teaching matters because our understanding of truth affects how we know Jesus Christ and how we live through His life within us. The purpose of rejecting error is not to become proud of possessing better information, but to walk faithfully in the truth Jesus Christ has revealed.

Carry These Principles Into Every Future Study

The principles established in this module must now accompany the student into every subject that follows. Future Study Guides will examine teachings that have often been shaped by long religious tradition.

Some conclusions may differ from what the student has previously heard. When that happens, the correct response is neither immediate acceptance nor immediate rejection.

Return to Scripture. Examine what is actually written. Ask the right questions. Compare the relevant verses. Test every conclusion.

Allow the whole Word of God to establish the truth.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**:

> *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

That instruction provides an appropriate conclusion to this module. We test because God's Word is the authority. We hold fast because truth is worth keeping.

Tradition must yield wherever it disagrees with Scripture, and every belief must remain subject to the truth God has revealed in His Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must recognising tradition's influence lead to testing every doctrine by the Bible?

Personal Reflection

What belief or attitude in your own life most needs the Berean standard, and how will you keep Christ central in examining it?

Action Step

Choose one belief you hold, test its words, context and related verses, then state what you will accept, correct or practise through Christ's life within.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why must every doctrine be tested by the Bible rather than accepted because a teacher is trusted or an idea is unfamiliar? Explain how the Bereans joined readiness to listen with searching, and what that requires when you examine your own beliefs.

2. Understanding

How do careful observation, word meaning, context and comparison of related verses work together to establish a conclusion? Use the distinction between KOSMOS and AION in **Matthew 12:32** *or* **Hebrews 9:26** *to explain why a familiar English word cannot decide the meaning by itself.*

3. Personal Reflection

Which part of careful Bible study most challenges your own habits: identifying the audience, recognising covenant setting, respecting time statements or comparing related verses? Explain one change you need to make and why.

4. Response to Truth

When a difficult verse seems to challenge clear biblical teaching, how will you respond without forcing an answer? Explain how your attitude and study habits will change as you consider all the relevant verses.

5. Action Step

Choose one doctrinal claim to examine this week. Which verses, audience, timeframe and related evidence will you investigate, when will you begin, and what belief, attitude or practice are you willing to correct if God's Word requires it?

6. Early Response

Have you begun examining that doctrinal claim and the personal change it may require? If yes, explain what you discovered and what belief, attitude or practice you have corrected or are reconsidering. If not, explain what has hindered you and how you will begin.

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you keep examining the foundation and each step of a teaching instead of searching only for verses that support its final claim? Explain a regular study practice, how you will include evidence that challenges your belief and how you will remain willing to accept correction.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

What distinguishes a direct statement, a sound inference and an unsupported assumption? Use the example of the gap inserted into the seventy weeks to explain why a teaching's foundation and the conclusions built upon it must be tested separately. Explain why possibility alone cannot establish doctrine.

9. Living the Truth

Someone teaches that a further spiritual experience or religious practice is needed to complete salvation. How would you examine that claim in the light of **Colossians 2:10** *and the wider testimony about Christ's completed work? Explain how you would answer respectfully and let the truth govern your own life.*

10. Final Response

Bring together the influence of tradition, the Berean attitude and the need for the Bible's words, setting and wider witness to establish doctrine. What has become clearer or needs correction in your own understanding? Explain how you will remain teachable and let established truth lead you to know Jesus Christ and live by His life within.