Healthy Skepticism
05-02-2021

What is skepticism? The word itself could be defined as intentional doubt or a question of credibility. It has come to mean a bit more in our culture today. If someone states they are a "skeptic", they likely mean that they are an atheist or that they do not believe in absolute truth. Ironically, most "skeptics" are NOT skeptical, as they accept a great deal to be true without questioning it. What they call skepticism is actually disbelief by choice, something very different. True skepticism examines all things, not just those things we desire to doubt.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul told the Thessalonians "*Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil*" (5:21-22). Many see faith and skepticism as being at odds, but God desires we have healthy skepticism. There are a number of times where God commends those with such a mind. For example, consider Thomas in John 20:24-29. The apostles said that Jesus had risen, but Thomas knew Jesus had died. Thomas explained that there was a sign he needed to see to believe. The next week, Jesus came and gave him the sign. Thomas then believed. He is a model of healthy skepticism. The Bereans of Acts 17 are also a model. When Paul preached to them the Gospel, they listened but tested all that he said. Such is called "noble-minded" in Scripture.

We can see by command and example that God desires us to have a healthy skepticism. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1). God desires us to test everything, to hold on to what is true, and to reject was is false. So how do we apply this concept to our lives?

First, to test all things requires that we have in mind a method to test. Thomas had a level of prood he needed, and the Bereans searched the Scriptures. We might apply other Biblical principles such as "*by the mouth of two or three witnesses*" (Matt. 18:16, 2 Cor. 13:1). We might also consider Jesus' teaching that "*by their fruits you will know them*" (Matt. 7). We need to test EVERYTHING to ascertain if it is true.

Once tested, we need to make a choice. If it is true, how do we need to apply it to ourselves? Do we need to change something, or accept something? Often it is that self-examination that is hardest. Paul told the Corinthians to test themselves (2 Cor. 13:5-6). That inferred that they needed to consider how to change themselves to the truth. But if it does not pass the test, we need to reject falsehood. We can "*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Eph. 5:11).

Too many times people have an unhealthy skepticism. Their belief or disbelief is not based on reasonable examination but instead on emotion and desire. They want something to be true or not to be true, and that desire directs their discernment. The atheist does not want to believe in God; thus he finds the facts that suit his desire. Too often Christians desire to believe something false, and are guilty too of unhealthy skepticism. They want to believe without testing. Consider how often we listen to a sermon and do not follow in our Bible; we are trusting someone else to be truthful, when we ought to test all things.

When Paul was on Mars Hill, he told the philosophers gathered that the One True God was one who desired people to seek Him. This requires a testing of truth and knowledge. Paul said God desired that we should seek Him; this requires a mind that discerns truth and denies falsehood. Therefore, test all things!