

# **The Standard of Truth**

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Standards are essential in life. If we did not have them, we could not buy a standard pound of meat, a standard gallon of gas, we would not even have a standard of currency or time. One definition of a standard is:

*“conforming to or constituting a standard of measurement or value; or of the usual or regularized or accepted kind; "windows of standard width" <sup>(1)</sup>*

Standards are critical in life, and no less so in assessing the truth of what we are told, or what we believe. There can only be one standard. If we have more than one standard, then we have two competing systems (i.e. metric and English systems of measurement). In the case of beliefs, two different standards will make differences in what we believe. Those differences may be minor and not impact essential, or it could result in a completely different gospel and essentially a different religion. The standard that we choose will affect how we determine what is truth and what is false in reference to our beliefs and to doctrine, therefore it is critical to establish the correct standard.

There cannot be two different sources of the standard. Just as the Bible warns that one man cannot serve two masters, a standard is the authority against which we measure truth, and there cannot be two authorities of truth without having the risk of differences in beliefs. Only one answer can be right – God does not contradict himself.

We have many different groups telling us that they have standards – some are the same, some different. Some have one standard, some have many. Examples are:

Catholicism: The Bible, Apocrypha, Tradition, Roman Catholic Church  
(Magisterium)

Mormonism: The Bible, Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Mormon Church  
President's teachings

Jehovah's Witnesses: The Bible, Governing Body

Christianity: The Bible

How do we know which is right? That is one of the questions that this document will attempt to answer. Now, since there are differences in opinion as to what the standard is, what we will use to determine what the right answer is? One thing which is common amongst most churches, denominations and religions that profess to be Christian is belief in the Bible either as the word of God, or as “a” word of God. Since this is the one source that is common, if God tells us in the Bible the answer, then we know that answer must apply, since if any other source were to contradict the Bible, it could not be true since God cannot contradict himself, and that would disqualify the other source as a standard.

First, we have a basic question that we need to address. If the Bible is so clear, why do we have so many sects and denominations? If God's Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as the Bible says (John 16:12), why do not all who profess Christ as Saviour agree?

In addition, we have Catholics who say that we need the mother Church to interpret the truth of God for us. We have the Mormons telling us that only the Mormon Church can do, and we have Jehovah's Witnesses telling us likewise that their organization is a "prophet" and has the truth.

How can we know the truth, or is it just not possible to know the truth? Are we going to be left to walk around groping in darkness to make our best guess at how to know the truth, and then find out the reality only when Jesus returns? If so, will those who are wrong be saved as long as they are sincere – after all, it would not be fair for God to condemn men when He did make His word clear to us, would it?

Let's deal with first things first. If there is any hope of knowing the truth of doctrine, then there must be a source. Unless we can identify that source, then trying to interpret it becomes a moot point. Is it even possible to know correct doctrine? The Bible has much to say about the importance of sound doctrine. Colossians warns against following the doctrines of men, thus making a division between true and false doctrines.

*Col 2:20-23*

*20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- 21 Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

*NKJV*

Prior to that, Paul warns of men deceiving them with persuasive words:

*Col 2:1-4*

*2:1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.*

*NKJV*

Paul also warns of deceiving and false doctrine in letters to Timothy:

*1 Tim 4:1-3*

*4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

*NKJV*

*2 Tim 4:2-5*

*2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching, 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

*NKJV*

And in Titus we read:

*Titus 1:8-9*

*9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.*

*NKJV*

Paul tells us in Corinthians the seriousness of making a division between false and true doctrine:

*2 John 8-11*

*9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.*

*NKJV*

Those who desire truth in doctrine are honoured:

*1 Tim 5:17-18*

*17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*

*NKJV*

God also gives some serious warnings about those who following false teachings:

*Prov 30:5-6*

*5 Every word of God is pure;  
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.*

*6 Do not add to His words,  
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.  
NKJV*

I do not mean to press this point too much, but so often people say that we cannot know sound doctrine, and that we must just do the best that we can or that we need another authority to explain truth to us because it was not given to us in writing in a way that we can understand. If God commands that we divide the true doctrine from the false, and gives warnings should we not do so, then clearly God has given us the means by which to discern true from false doctrine.

Why do we need sound doctrine?

*Eph 4:11-16  
11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,  
and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of  
ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of  
the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure  
of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children,  
tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of  
men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in  
love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom  
the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according  
to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the  
body for the edifying of itself in love.  
NKJV*

If we are not grounded in the truth, then we can be deceived, tossed to and fro by every wave of doctrine. Have you ever noticed how easily a persuasive speaker who has revealed a new understanding of the Bible sways some people to a new idea? And then when the next speaker comes to town, they have yet another new idea to follow? We are not to be tossed to and fro by every wave of doctrine. We need an anchor, and that anchor according to Proverbs 30 is God's word.

What did Jesus use as His source for doctrine?

*Matt 21:41-42  
42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:  
NKJV*

*Matt 22:29-30  
29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the  
Scriptures nor the power of God.  
NKJV*

*Matt 26:56*

56 But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

NKJV

*John 5:39*

39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

NKJV

We could provide numerous other references. Jesus went to the written scriptures when he wanted to establish what the truth of doctrine is. Since Jesus is God (Is 9:6), it is fair to assume that He would know where to find God's truth. Jesus did not identify any other source for God's word other than scripture. Indeed Paul tells us that the scripture are inspired by God, and thus are God's word:

*2 Tim 3:15-17*

*16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

NKJV

What other evidence do we have that the scripture are our source for testing the truth of doctrine?

*Acts 17:10-12*

*10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

NKJV

The Bereans were commended for testing even the words of Paul using scripture. This one is particularly interesting because both Roman Catholics and Mormons (amongst others) tell us that we must follow the apostolic teachings. Yet here we see that the Bereans were commended for testing the words of Paul using the scriptures. The Bereans thus placed the scriptures above the words of Paul on matters of doctrine. This is important because one can only test with a standard and any standard, whether it is in the secular world as a standard of measure, a standard of performance, a design standard, or any other standard is established first as a singular authoritative source that defines the objective or the truth. The standard must always be a higher authority than the item under test.

Thus what we see here is that the scriptures were a higher authority than the words of the Apostles. Further, we see that the men of Berea were able to understand and properly

apply the scriptures to test the words of one of the Apostles. The men of Berea applied the same standard that Jesus showed them to us, and that is the scriptures. The Bible elsewhere exhorts use of the scriptures as the source of sound doctrine:

*2 Tim 3:14-15*

*14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

*NKJV*

*Rom 15:2-4*

*3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

*NKJV*

*Acts 18:27-28*

*27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.*

*NKJV*

Further, 1 Cor 4:6 tells us that we are not to go beyond what is written:

*1 Cor 4:6-7*

*6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.*

*NKJV*

But what about the Holy Tradition that the Roman Catholic Church says is a second part of the treasury of truth? They say that Tradition must be used to help us understand the meaning of the Bible. The following verse is used to support their position on the use of their tradition:

*2 Thess 2:15*

*15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.*

*NKJV*

*2 Thess 3:6*

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

NKJV

Look first at 2 Thess 2:15. One thing that is often overlooked here is that Paul is clear that the tradition that he is referring to is presented both by word (verbal) and by the epistle (written word). That being the case, this cannot refer to the oral tradition that the Roman Catholic Church claims, because Paul is referring to a singular message given in two media. Since Paul is no longer here, nor are the other apostles to speak the word, we can look at what they said verbally by reading the epistles. Anything which goes beyond what Paul wrote is therefore contrary to the tradition to which Paul refers.

Once we understand that in context, then 2 Thess 3:6 become clear. It says that we should withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and Paul says that he is referring to those who do not walk according to the tradition which we have today in the epistles contained within the Bible. Rather than being an endorsement of Catholic tradition, this is a warning against it, and indeed any teaching that is not found within the Bible.

There are other traditions that the Bible speaks about, and these are traditions of men, which the Bible describes as traditions added to what the Bible says. We are warned against those traditions:

*Matt 15:6-9*

*Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7*

*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:*

*8'These people draw near to Me with their mouth,*

*And honor Me with their lips,*

*But their heart is far from Me.*

*9 And in vain they worship Me,*

*Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "*

*NKJV*

*Mark 7:9-10*

*9 And He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*

*NKJV*

Therefore any tradition that is outside of the Bible is considered a commandment of men, and to be avoided.

Now let's get back to the questions that we asked near the start of this document.

*If the Bible is so clear, why do we have so many sects and denominations?*

*If God's Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as the Bible says (John 16:12), why do not all who profess Christ as Saviour agree?*

First, if we look at the faiths listed earlier, Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, we see that each of these tries to include additional standards to the Bible. As we said earlier, there can only be one standard. Once you include 2 or more, there will be deviations. In the case of each of the above, the other standards are either used to interpret or to add to the Bible. When you use a source to interpret something else, then that become the defacto primary standard since the Bible must be understood in light of that other standard. The Bible thus is made a secondary, not a primary standard.

In so doing, additions are made to the Bible and the message of the Bible is altered by being made to conform to the interpretation of an outside source. By so doing, the doctrine of these groups will be altered and thus divisions will be caused. Some of these divisions may be minor, but other will be major. For example, Roman Catholicism teaches the following, all of which has been added to the teaching of the Bible from tradition.

- Men become gods or become God (Catechism article 460). Promotes the error that Satan gave in the garden to Adam and Eve.
- Belief that men must pay for part of their sins in purgatory or by penance (denying the sufficiency of the sacrifice on the cross)

The other religions mentioned earlier have similar serious errors. But are not some denominations sound? Why then the differences? The reasons for different denominations come from different sources. Many or most have little or nothing to do with doctrine, for example:

- Physical location
- Similar calling or ministry focus
- Historical roots

There are different denominations that have arisen from doctrinal differences, some of which are non-essential difference and some that are more important. An example of non-essentials is the question of whether baptism must be by full immersion or not. Other differences are more serious, such as the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism (which I do not intend to discuss in detail in this document).

So when we do run into doctrinal issues between denominations or movements both of whom hold the Bible as their sole measure of truth, how do we deal with that? How can we know truth? Is there any way to resolve such differences? After all, the Holy Spirit promised to guide all Christians into truth, so how can there be such a wide gulf between Bible believing Christians?

I'd like to suggest that there are a variety of reasons that such differences exist. One such reason is human fallibility. Though we often try to convince ourselves otherwise, the



truth is that we are not perfect and our understanding is not perfect. Until Christ perfects us, we will make mistakes. As long as we understand this, this does not present a major issue. Groups such as Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses which attribute a degree of infallibility to their leadership are at greatest risk, because they claim that certain people, perhaps under certain situations are not subject to human failings in their teaching like the rest of us. That leaves them open to deception and effectively creates a different primary standard for them – the word of men (certain men), a standard that replaces the word of God as the primary source or standard for doctrine. Remember what Jesus said about the commandments of men?

The best way to address this is to realize that men are not perfect and realize that God tells us to test doctrine and to exhort and correct others in areas where we err in doctrine, and not to forsake the fellowship of believers. Done properly, we help to build each other up, and help the body of Christ as a whole to continue to grow stronger in the truth of God's word. Those who put their full trust in the words of certain men lose that correction and typically stray further and further from the truth.

Differences will never disappear, but the difference will typically not be serious as long as we have love of truth and remain true to the sole standard that God gave us for doctrinal truth, the Bible.

Another key reason is the method by which we understand or interpret scripture. Again, Roman Catholicism, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are required to accept the interpretation given to them by their Church or organization. They believe that there must be one sole God-given source of understanding and through this we become unified as one body. Note that by so doing, again, the standard has moved from God's word to the organization. Just as the organization can err in their interpretation, no interpretation of men will be perfect.

If one was asked to find out accurately what an historic figure, let's say Winston Churchill, believed or taught about certain events in history, how would you go about it? Well, there are a few options:

- Talk to the person, but in the case of Churchill, he is dead, so that is not an option.
- Talk to people who may have interviewed or known him very well. Again, few if any people who fall into that category would still be available, so we need to discount that also.
- Read what people who have done similar studies say about what he thought. This is a real option, but it is important to realize that any writings like this will have biases, but their thoughts may provide some pointers.
- Read what he actually wrote. Even if you read what others have to say about the topic, to verify the accuracy of what they say, you will want to go back and verify this from the source.

This is the typical approach that any student would take to determine that they have an accurate understand for any area of study, yet so many people will say that this just isn't

possible with the Bible. Why not? I would suggest that not only is it possible, for the sake of accuracy, it is essential. Further, unlike other topics, we have an additional promise from God that comes into effect when those who have received Jesus as Saviour study His word.

*John 16:13-15*

*13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*

*NKJV*

Thus since all scripture is inspired by God, we who have received Jesus as Saviour can effectively be guided into understanding the truth by the author, further helping to ensure accuracy of our understanding.

Well, why the differences between Christian, though – don't all Christians do this? No, unfortunately. Too many depend upon others for their interpretation, either by blindly accepting what they hear in church, or through confessions or catechisms, or by means of commentaries. They in effect make the manmade sources their standard for truth rather than going back to the Bible to verify whether what they are being taught is true.

Lastly, can we ever avoid our own personal biases when we study the Bible? That is difficult. We always want to believe that we are right, but those who are honest will be willing to admit that they can be wrong. The question is do we really love God's word and truth enough to allow ourselves to be found to be wrong and to submit our beliefs to the test of His word? If so, it may be uncomfortable, but God's word can then work through us, guiding us through the help of the Holy Spirit into all truth.

As for those who lack of love of truth and want to bend the Bible to say what either they or other men teach, the Bible has a serious warning:

*2 Thess 2:8-12*

*9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

*NKJV*

Those who lack love of truth will receive a strong delusion and receive the lie. All who love Christ should also love His truth and His word.

## Bibliography

- (1) *WordNet* ® 1.6, © 1997 Princeton University, found on <http://www.dictionary.com>