

December 2023

Frank W. Nelte

### **GOD TESTS OUR INTEGRITY**

We have all become a part of God's Church at different times. Some of us may only have come into God's Church a year or two ago, and others of us have been in the Church since the 1960s or 70s. However long we may already be a part of God's Church, here we are. We all keep the weekly Sabbath and the annual three Feasts and seven Holy Days. We don't eat unclean foods, and we accept tithing and certain other additional teachings of God's Church.

And while we may not say it out loud, we all quietly hope that Jesus Christ's second coming is not too far into the future, hopefully during our own lifetime. This hope we have already (in most cases) nurtured for decades. After all, we have been instructed to pray "please let Your Kingdom come soon" (see Matthew 6:10).

So what does God expect from us? What else are we supposed to learn? Does God just expect us to continue to live by all of His laws, as we are doing now, until the day we die? **What else does God want from us?** Is there anything else?

There is one extremely important thing that God is testing with every member of His Church right now, and that is this: **God wants to know with absolute certainty that He can really trust us!** Can God unerringly predict how we, with our own free will, will respond in every possible circumstance? Are we 100% dependable? Or **do some of our actions and our behavior create some uncertainty in God's mind about us**, regarding whether we are really totally reliable?

Consider something Paul tells us about God.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him: For whom **the Lord** loves He chastens, and **scourges every son whom He receives**. (Hebrews 12:5-6)

This is not an isolated statement. This same point is made repeatedly throughout the Bible. For example:

**Blessed is the man whom You chasten** (Hebrew = discipline, correct), O LORD, and teach him out of Your law; (Psalm 94:12)

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right, and *that in faithfulness You have afflicted* (Hebrew = humbled, humiliated) **me**. (Psalm 119:75)

For **whom the LORD loves He corrects**; even as a father (corrects) the son *in whom* he delights. (Proverbs 3:12)

**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:** be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

The point should be clear. God corrects and chastises, and sometimes quite severely (i.e. “scourges”), the people God loves. Now that’s not how you and I have raised our children, is it? We haven’t “scourged” our children, have we? When we think of rearing our children, “scourging” is not something that ever enters the picture, right?

So the question is: **why would God “scourge” the people He loves?**

This question brings us back to our earlier question “what else does God want from us?”. This matter is what the Apostle Paul was talking about in Hebrews 12.

The reason God corrects, rebukes, chastens and scourges us is that **God is testing** not just our obedience to His laws, but **our integrity**. Obedience to God’s laws and integrity are not the same thing. “Obedience” refers to what we do right now. “Integrity” includes our obedience right now, but it also includes what we will do under different conditions in the future.

**It is integrity that predicts our future conduct and behavior.**

Our integrity is tested when we find ourselves in adverse conditions. Yes, right now we fully accept and practice all of God’s laws to the best of our understanding. But how will we respond when we are expected to change in some way? Will we actually change then or not? Will we always honestly and in sincerity acknowledge errors and faults, by being **willing to change** when those errors and faults come to our attention?

God is not only looking at what we are like right now. God also needs to know what we will be like **under different circumstances**. Specifically:

Since it is a given that “the carnal mind is enmity against God”, therefore God needs to find out if our minds have really been “renewed” (see Romans 12:2), or if our minds still harbor some elements of enmity towards God’s truth.

One common way God tests the integrity of our conversion is to **confront us with something that is still wrong** in our personal **practices, actions** or **understanding**. When confronted with something that is still wrong in our conduct or understanding, do we change or do we continue with whatever is wrong? Are we willing to do whatever is required to correct the “something” that is still wrong?

I say “**still wrong**” because I am not referring to the changes we had to make when we first came to understand the truth of God, changes like not working on the Sabbath, not eating unclean meats, not destroying our own health by smoking, not keeping Christmas, etc.

By “still wrong” I am referring to things that come to our attention now, after we have already practiced God’s way of life for many years. **Now suddenly something new has come to our attention**, and we have to decide how to respond.

Situations like that become tests of integrity. In fact, **the greatest integrity test of all** is a willingness to change when we become aware of something that is wrong. It is the greatest integrity test because it requires us to acknowledge that we have been wrong, and that we are motivated to make things right.

In situations like that it is as if God is saying:

Yes, I know that you try to keep all My laws; I know that you strive to do what is right. But **here is something you didn’t expect**, something you are not prepared for, something that goes against your status quo. What are you going to do now? Will you change and deal with this unexpected situation? Or will you resist changing? **What will you do?**

Our integrity is tested when we have to deal with unexpected situations.

Being corrected, chastened, rebuked or scourged all represent unexpected situations, occasions that will test our integrity. So how we deal with correction and chastening reveals our integrity before God. David understood this. And that’s why David referred to such chastening as **a blessing** from God (Psalm 94:12). Obviously any form of chastening is never pleasant (Hebrews 12:11). But having to change something that is wrong represents **an opportunity** to demonstrate our integrity to God.

Let’s look at some examples where people were confronted with the challenge to make some changes.

## **THE PRIEST ELI**

Eli was a faithful servant of God at God’s sanctuary in Shiloh. He faithfully carried out his priestly duties. But his two sons were evil and perverse (1 Samuel 2:12, 22). Eli found out about the evil doings of his sons, and Eli very weakly asked his sons to stop their evil deeds (1 Samuel 2:23-25). But he took no action to stop his sons from perverting the office of the priest.

So God sent Eli a stern warning. “And there came a man of God unto Eli ...” (see 1 Samuel 2:27-36). God’s charge against Eli was that “you honor your sons above Me ...” (Verse 29). In other words, **God expected Eli to remove his sons from the priesthood** (i.e. the equivalent of disfellowshipping his sons), but Eli didn’t do that. Instead, Eli allowed his sons to continue to function as priests.

So God gave Eli one warning through a “man of God” in verse 27. And then God gave Eli a second warning, this time much more threatening, through the young boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10-18). This warning should have motivated Eli to take immediate action. But instead Eli responded the worst possible way! Eli’s response of “it is the Eternal, **let Him do what seems good to Him**” (verse 18) sounds good, but it is the last thing that God expected Eli to say. Eli’s answer in effect said: **I am not**

**going to change!** So let God do what He wants to do.

The evil conduct of his sons represented **the most important test** that Eli ever had to face in his capacity of being God's High Priest, and **Eli failed the test!** Eli was not going to change. Rather than changing, **Eli chose the penalty** that ... "the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever" (1 Samuel 3:14). That seems to be a reference to death in the lake of fire.

**The warning**, which God said would make "both the ears of every one that hears it tingle" (verse 11) **did nothing at all for Eli.** Nothing!

Eli simply refused to change; he refused to take action. This aspect of Eli's character would never have come out into the open without Eli's sons grossly perverting the office of the priest, requiring Eli "to disfellowship his own sons", i.e. as seen from our perspective today. Eli put his sons above honoring God. This proved that Eli lacked integrity before God.

Note one important point here!

Eli's test was not about how Eli conducted his own life. It seems that Eli himself tried his best to put all of God's laws into practice in his own life. He didn't kill, steal, lie, break the Sabbath, commit adultery, etc. Eli's test was about how **somebody else**, for whom Eli was responsible, was breaking the laws of God. His own sons were contemptuously breaking God's laws. Their evil conduct became Eli's test.

Because they were priests (i.e. in our context, they were ministers in the Church), and because Eli was the spiritual leader in Israel (i.e. in our context, Eli was the human leader in the Church), therefore **Eli was 100% responsible for punishing their evil conduct**, by putting them out of the priesthood (i.e. in our context, disfellowshipping them, and putting them out of the ministry).

A lesson for us:

One immediately obvious lesson for us is that if a leading minister in any Church of God organization has a son who brazenly breaks the laws of God, and if that son becomes a minister in the same organization as his father, then the father either has to put his son out of the ministry and also disfellowship his son, or that father will be "honoring his son above honoring God" (the principle of 1 Samuel 2:29).

Let's understand that God is not just testing our actions and conduct, which should be 100% in agreement with God's laws. God also tests our minds, how we think and reason. When a close family member (parent, child, sibling, spouse, etc.) contemptuously and flippantly breaks the laws of God, **what are our thoughts?** That is something God wants to know.

Do we rationalize and think: well, God hasn't called my ... (parent, child, sibling, spouse, etc.), so their breaking of God's laws isn't really a big deal. They'll come up in the second resurrection, and then they'll live by all of God's laws? Is that how we reason?

For a start, we need to be very cautious about concluding that God “hasn’t called my ... (close relative)”, simply because that close relative has never at any point shown any interest in any part of God’s Church. Whether or not someone shows any interest in God’s truth is not the criterion for establishing whether or not that person has been called by God. There is a difference between not being called by God and actively rejecting a calling from God. So it is wise for us in such circumstances to avoid reaching any conclusions regarding whether or not someone close to us was called by God.

Next, it doesn’t make a difference whether God has called someone or not: **breaking the laws of God is always “a big deal”!** It is always a serious matter before God! Simply because God is willing, upon genuine repentance, “to wink at the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30), that doesn’t make it any less of “a big deal”! Jesus Christ did not sacrifice His life for sins that aren’t “a big deal”. All breaking of the laws of God is always a serious matter, and God expects us to treat it as such.

The attitude of sighing and crying for “all the abominations that are done” in our world today (see Ezekiel 9:4) must include all the evils we are aware of. That includes our responses to people who are close to us, and who are readily breaking God’s laws. Remember Eli!

Let’s look at another example.

## **KING SAUL**

When the people of Israel rebelled against God and asked for a king, God gave them Saul to be their king. Initially Saul was humble and teachable, and God gave Saul a great victory over the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11:11). Then, after Saul had been king for two years (1 Samuel 13:1), the Philistines gathered a huge army to attack Israel. Saul was seriously outnumbered, and the Israelites were somewhat fearful of this Philistine army (verses 6-7).

The Prophet Samuel had instructed Saul to wait for seven days in Gilgal (verse 8), for Samuel to come and join him. **This was a test from God!** Samuel was obviously aware of the difficult situation Israel was in, and Samuel didn’t just twiddle his thumbs for seven days before going to meet Saul and his army. It was a national crisis. But Samuel delayed going to Saul for seven days on God’s instructions.

God wanted to find out **how Saul would handle stress**. Would he be faithful and rely on God? Or would his fears get the better of him?

On the seventh day Saul **lost faith** in the instructions he had been given, and he then **acted presumptuously**. He felt that a burnt offering needed to be brought to God, and since Samuel was not yet there, Saul himself presumptuously performed the sacrifice (verse 9). This was a major transgression, because God had established that only the priests, who all were of the line of Aaron, were permitted to perform sacrifices. Saul was a Benjamite, and he was certainly not permitted to perform any sacrifices.

And then just as Saul was finishing with the sacrifice He had performed, Samuel arrived (verse 10).

Samuel confronted Saul with his sin, and Saul promptly justified himself with his reply “**I forced myself** therefore and offered a burnt offering” (verse 12).

Instead of freely acknowledging his error, Saul justified himself, claiming that it was really Samuel's fault, because Samuel only arrived late. And therefore Saul had “forced himself” to do the priest's job.

This was a major test for Saul, and **Saul failed the test!**

As Samuel then told Saul:

And Samuel said to Saul, you have done foolishly: you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you: for **now would the LORD have established your kingdom upon Israel for ever**. But now your kingdom shall not continue: the LORD has sought Him a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* captain over His people, because you have not kept *that* which the LORD commanded you. (1 Samuel 13:13-14)

[As an aside, this statement “the LORD has sought Him a man after His own heart” is here made a number of years before God chose David in 1 Samuel 16:1. What this statement, made by Samuel, tells us is that God is **always** looking for men and women “after His own heart”. Each one of us in God's Church is expected to be a person “after God's own heart”. It was never intended to be a description that would only apply to David. God expects you and me to also be people “after God's heart”.]

Samuel understood why God had wanted Samuel to arrive slightly on the late side, but still on the appointed day. It was so that Saul's faith in God would be tested. And Saul failed the test.

A lesson for us:

Saul's most important test was not about keeping all of the ten commandments. Saul's most important test was a test of his faith. In the process of failing this test, Saul also acted presumptuously in bringing a sacrifice. But the most important thing was that **Saul didn't have faith!** And, as the Apostle Paul tells us:

But **without faith *it is impossible to please Him*** ... (Hebrews 11:6)

So considering our own lives and our own circumstances: yes, we must obey all of God's laws. That is the foundation of every Christian life. But that doesn't mean that being careful to keep all of God's laws is the only way we will be tested by God. **God also tests us with things that don't involve keeping or breaking any laws of God.** God also tests all of us in matters of faith.

Now when God tests our faith, usually **we don't remotely grasp the vital significance of that specific occasion**. In most cases we can only grasp in retrospect the importance of that specific test. The principle God is using here is that ... “he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much” (see

Luke 16:10). We don't need to know that a specific test we are experiencing is more important than any other test. We need to see all our tests as important.

And sometimes our most significant tests of faith may well involve "things that are least". How conscientious are we in striving to please God? **Dealing conscientiously** with all matters small and great is a demonstration of faith in God. A major fault with the Pharisees was that they were indeed very conscientious when it came to dealing with the smallest of matters, while at the same time they were callous when it came to dealing with major points of keeping God's laws. As Jesus Christ said:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: **these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.** (Matthew 23:23)

Tithing on your little herb garden is **a very minor issue** when we consider the laws that regulate tithing. Many other things are far more important, both on the question of tithing, and on the question of Christian living in general. And **yet** Jesus Christ tells us that **we are to be conscientious in both areas**, the small matters and the big matters.

We need to recognize that our "small tests" are extremely important in the eyes of God, because small tests reveal highly significant aspects of our character.

### **MR. ARMSTRONG'S EXPERIENCE**

When Mr. Armstrong came into contact with the remnants of God's Church in the 1920s, his wife Loma became very sick. A simple, but very sincere man from those people then prayed for Mrs. Armstrong, and by the next morning she was totally healed of several simultaneous very serious health problems.

Mr. Armstrong was highly impressed by the man who had prayed for Mrs. Armstrong. Therefore Mr. Armstrong took a short article he had written about the "Friday afternoon Crucifixion & Sunday morning Resurrection" to this man. This incident is recorded in Chapter 19 of Mr. Armstrong's Autobiography, under the Chapter title "Trying to Convert Relatives".

The remnants of God's Church at that time accepted the Friday-Sunday teaching about the crucifixion and resurrection. This teaching Mr. Armstrong had proved from the Bible to be false. Mr. Armstrong was excited to show this man the "new truth" which Mr. Armstrong explained in that short article. It was "new truth" for the whole remnant of the Church of God at that time.

When a few days later Mr. Armstrong asked this man what he thought about the article that disproved a Sunday morning resurrection, the man acknowledged that the article was biblically correct, but he advised Mr. Armstrong that "it would be better for you to just forget all about that", and continue to accept a Friday afternoon crucifixion date. In spite of the biblical proof that had been given to him, **this man refused to change his understanding** regarding the times for the crucifixion and the resurrection.

Mr. Armstrong was very disappointed. Then when Mr. Armstrong saw the man again a week or two later, the man said:

“Brother, something terrible has come over me. **God has left me. He doesn’t answer my prayers any more.** I don’t understand what has happened.” (Chapter 19, subsection “Truth or Consequences”)

Since reading Mr. Armstrong’s short article, the man had also prayed for several other people to be healed of various health problems. But none of them were healed. And the man himself recognized that God was not answering his prayers.

When the man rejected new understanding that was presented to him, understanding which he could not refute, then this showed that **he lacked integrity before God.** He simply was not prepared to accept new truth that contradicted something he had always believed. He was not willing to change.

The lesson for us:

This flaw in the man’s character, an **unwillingness to correct wrong understanding**, would never have been exposed without the man actually being confronted with a truth that required him to reject a teaching he had always accepted as correct. Without this confrontation with the truth about the time of the resurrection this man was in **the identical position to the priest Eli**, before Eli found out about the evil ways of his two sons. Both men were sincere in their own lives and their own conduct. And then both were confronted with information that absolutely required them to change something. For Eli it was his responsibility to put his two sons out of the priesthood. And for this man it was his responsibility to reject the “Good Friday - Easter Sunday” teaching.

But both men refused to change.

### **ANOTHER EXPERIENCE FOR MR. ARMSTRONG**

Some time later Mr. Armstrong came to understand that God requires us to not only observe the weekly Sabbath, but also the three annual Feasts and the seven annual Holy Days. By then Mr. Armstrong had been ordained into the ministry of God’s Church.

When Mr. Armstrong presented this new truth about the Feasts and the Holy Days to the congregation, they laughed him to scorn. They flatly rejected the biblical proof Mr. Armstrong presented for this new understanding. It was once again a case of people refusing clear biblical evidence that required them to make a change in their lives. And **the people refused to change.** And so Mr. & Mrs. Armstrong kept all the Feasts and Holy Days on their own for 7 years, before others then joined them in keeping these annual observances.

The lesson for us:

People are reluctant to accept things that require them to make some changes. Instead, people will hold



fast to what they have always done, and what they have always believed. **Clear logical proof** for changes that need to be made **is often rejected out of hand**. We need to recognize that when something goes against established customs and beliefs, then people are very commonly “**willingly ignorant**” of the facts they don’t like, just like the people the Apostle Peter tells us about, in 1 Peter 3:5.

**An unwillingness to accept facts** that we don’t like is always a sign of a lack of integrity. Why? Because there is never a justification for rejecting a truth, for rejecting facts that we cannot disprove. It is, after all, the truth that sets us free. As Jesus Christ tells us:

And you shall **know** the truth, and **the truth shall make you free**. (John 8:32)

So how many ministers are there today in the various Church of God groups, who lack integrity, who refuse to acknowledge truths that they are unable to deny, truths that require them to make some changes?

People who don’t know the truth are in slavery to ignorance. When people are then exposed to the truth, but still deny the truth anyway, then we are witnessing the powerful hold that slavery has on the minds of such people. So people who deny any truth which they cannot disprove are certainly not free.

They are **firmly enslaved by the falsehood** which they accept in place of the truth. So when you see anyone denying a proven truth, you are looking at a person whose mind is enslaved to the falsehood they believe and defend. And as long as their thinking is still in that slavery, there is nothing you can do to help them.

Such unwillingness to accept and acknowledge a truth that they cannot refute represents a very serious blemish on a person’s character, serious enough for the person to be rejected by God. It means that God cannot trust such an individual to always accept the truth.

## **A TEST FOR EVERY MEMBER OF GOD’S CHURCH**

Every member of God’s Church keeps the Sabbath and all of the other laws of God that we are aware of. We all strive to faithfully live God’s way of life. I suspect that there are many thousands of us around the world right now. And God can see how we strive to put His laws into practice in our lives. That tells God something about our character and our integrity.

But there is still something missing. Here is a question that needs an answer:

Of those many thousands of people around the world right now, **how many are willing to change**, when evidence is presented, that our present understanding is in some way wrong? **It is not going to be 100%** of those people, is it? No, 100% of those people will not be willing to change their practices or their beliefs when clear evidence for such needed changes is presented to them.

There will be those, who right now observe the Sabbath and God's other laws, who will not accept evidence that contradicts something they currently believe. **They will refuse to change.** This was true for the people Mr. Armstrong dealt with in the 1920s and 30s, and it is true for God's Church today. For such people, the things they were taught take precedence over facts that prove some of the things they were taught to be in error.

In Psalm 15:1 David asked the question: who will be in the first resurrection? David then lists various character attributes for those who will be in God's Kingdom. In verse 4 he said:

In whose eyes a vile person is despised; but he honors them that fear the LORD. **He that swears to his own hurt, and changes not.** (Psalms 15:4)

This refers to "**not changing a commitment**" (i.e. in O.T. times an oath) that we have made. That means we are reliable. But this verse has nothing to do with changing when we are wrong. When we are wrong, then God always expects us to change.

Always keeping the commitments we have made is an expression of integrity. In this verse David is referring to people being confronted by **unexpected consequences** of the commitments they have made. Those unexpected consequences in turn place **unexpected demands** on those people. And when people are faced with unexpected but valid demands, that is when people sometimes try to get out of the commitments they have made. In that situation it is the true Christian who continues to try to fulfill the commitments he has made. That is what Psalm 15:4 is referring to.

So to be clear: we who are members of God's Church must assuredly be putting all of God's laws into practice in our lives. But I suspect that **the tests that still lie ahead of us** right now, tests we will have to face before Jesus Christ's second coming, **are not going to be about keeping or not keeping the laws of God.**

I strongly suspect that the most important tests that still lie ahead of us are going to be about us having faith in God or not having faith. Keeping all of God's laws are "the entrance exam" for becoming a part of God's Church. But in order to "graduate" at Jesus Christ's second coming we will have to pass **tests of faith**, which may actually have nothing directly to do with the ten commandments.

That was true for Abraham when God instructed him to sacrifice Isaac. That was true for Eli and for King Saul. In fact, that was also true for all the people who are mentioned in the faith chapter, in Hebrews 11. Tests of faith are on a higher level than tests of obedience to the ten commandments.

It is important to understand this quite clearly! Why? Because there are many people attending the various churches of God who think that obedience to all of God's laws is all that is expected from them. But that is simply not the case. **Tests of obedience are for beginners.** Obedience only represents "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" (see Hebrews 6:1), meaning the basics. From that foundation we must "**go on unto perfection**" (same verse).

That's where tests of faith enter the picture, when we strive to "go on unto perfection".

The real danger is that people who think they are okay before God, because they are trying to live by all of God's commandments, may not be mentally prepared for tests that don't directly involve any of the ten commandments, things that will test our faith in God. I have no idea what those tests are going to be, and I have no desire to speculate in this regard.

But when Samuel told Saul to wait seven days for him, Saul did not have the vaguest idea that this simple instruction would determine his future and the future of his dynasty. When God gave Adam the simple instruction to not eat the fruit of one very specific tree, Adam had no idea that this simple instruction would determine his own future, and the future of his descendants.

I believe that it is certain that when our most important tests come upon us, and those will be tests of faith, then we will have no idea whatsoever of the profound importance which the outcome of those specific tests will have on our future. And **that is the way it must be!**

It cannot be that we are told in advance: look, this situation you are about to face will determine your destiny for all future eternity. We cannot have that kind of advance warning for, or understanding of, specific tests. Why? Because if we comprehend the magnitude of the occasion, then we'll be on our best behavior. And God does not want to know what we are like "**on our best behavior**".

When we are "on our best behavior" then that doesn't tell God anything about our real character. But God wants to know what we are like all the time, specifically what we are like **when we are off-guard**. Those are the situations that reveal our real character.

Here is a basic premise we need to recognize:

Whatever we are like when we are totally off-guard, that is what we are **really** like! And that is what God needs to find out.

Whatever we are like when we are on our best behavior is only put-on, and it is not a reflection of our real character. It is only "our best behavior".

Therefore it is inevitable that our greatest tests will confront us when we least expect them. What this means is that "our best behavior" must be **the way we always are**, when we are on-guard, and also when we are off-guard. Only that way can "our best behavior" be a reflection of the real us, with no facade of any kind.

So what about you?

## **HOW DO WE RESPOND TO NEW UNDERSTANDING?**

We are established in the Church's teachings. We do our best to live by all of God's laws. Our understanding is based on having been in the Church for decades already. We know what the Bible teaches, right?

Over the past three decades or so there have been a lot of people who have presented "new truth" to us. They present to us explanations of the Scriptures that are different from what we have always believed. And now those people do some things differently from the way we do those things.

So how do we respond to those "new truths"? Do we accept those new explanations? Do we reject those new explanations? What do we do? And yes, the great majority of those new explanations are biblically wrong, and we need to resolutely reject those new explanations.

But how do we distinguish between what is right and must be accepted by us, and what is wrong and must be rejected by us?

The process here should always be the same. And that is: we need to evaluate every new teaching or explanation on its own merits. We always need to examine the facts. Facts are stubborn, and they refuse to be changed.

So we should always look at the facts.

**Prove all things**; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

"Prove all things" means that we should not just reject something new out of hand, simply because it goes against our own beliefs. We must have valid reasons for rejecting new explanations. In other words, we should be able to say; "I reject your new teaching or explanation **because ...**". And in this case our "because ..." must itself also be logically sound and correct. Our "because ..." must never be an expression of our own bias and prejudice.

So when a new explanation is presented to us, how do we go about testing it? We should use the approach of the Bereans.

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**. (Acts 17:11)

The expression "whether those things were so" means that **we examine the evidence** that is presented for the new teaching or explanation. The evidence that is presented is the chief criterion. Is that evidence sound, or is it flawed? Proof that the new explanation is correct? Proof that it is not correct? Proof that our existing understanding is wrong? The evidence itself that is presented for the "new truth" holds the key as to whether that "new truth" must be accepted or rejected.

One approach that is always wrong is simply to refuse to consider the evidence that is presented. Can that evidence be refuted? If not, do we accept it as valid?

Now obviously, sometimes there are people whose evidence for some or other doctrinal change has more holes in it than a common kitchen strainer. Yet those people may refuse to acknowledge all the flaws in their supposed “evidence”. And then we need to firmly reject their new ideas. But in rejecting their ideas, we have established clear mistakes in their reasoning.

Our rejection must not be based on prejudice alone. I say “not prejudice alone” because I myself am “prejudiced” against all heresies, teachings I have in the past proved to be in error. But even when we have a prejudice against some new idea, we still need to evaluate the evidence that is presented to support this new idea. We have nothing to fear in examining any evidence that is presented. If the new teaching is false, then the evidence for this new teaching will also prove itself to be false. And if the evidence proves to be true, then we need to have the strength of character to acknowledge that true evidence.

I also say “not prejudice alone” because all of us have **a spontaneous rejection** for any new ideas that contradict what we already believe. In theory we may say: we need to examine this evidence without bias or prejudice. And that sounds fine. But it doesn’t work in practice. When someone presents any new teaching that contradicts something we already believe, then we are going to have a spontaneous prejudice against that something new. And the focus of our examination of the facts which are presented, if we are actually willing to look at those facts, will be to support our present belief, and to find some faults with the new teaching. That is just the way it is, right?

**It is this spontaneous rejection of new understanding on our part that God uses to test our integrity.** When some new understanding threatens a belief that we have always accepted, then we are going to be spontaneously critical towards that new understanding. It then becomes a matter of integrity on our part to be willing to examine the evidence that is presented.

Are we actually willing to honestly examine the facts? If the facts destroy something we have always accepted as correct, will we actually admit those facts? Or will we deny those facts?

A common ploy of people who refuse to acknowledge facts that contradict their own position is to **switch the focus to something else**. Whenever their key “proof” is shown to be invalid, instead of acknowledging that they were wrong, they switch to **some other supposed proof**. And if that “other proof” is also shown to be invalid, they simply switch the focus once again to something new.

Here is the point:

Whenever someone uses that approach on you, switching the focus instead of admitting defeat, then you need to understand that **you are dealing with a person who lacks integrity**. Some other “proof” cannot erase the fact that their original proof was false! Some other proof cannot make their original argument correct.

Such people lack integrity because **they always start out with the conclusion**. And then they try to find “proof” to support that conclusion. And when that proof turns out to be false, then they look for different “proof” to support their original position. No matter how many times the “proof” they present is shown to be false, they continue to search for something, anything, to support the original conclusion they started out with. Their approach proves that their minds are made up.

Consider for a moment the process used by science, when a scientist puts forward a totally new theory for explaining some process or phenomenon.

Whenever a scientist puts forward a new scientific theory, it is the responsibility of every other true scientist **to do his utmost to disprove that new theory**. It is only when nobody is able to present anything that can disprove the new theory, that then the new theory should receive some consideration. But to start out with a theorized conclusion, and to then only consider information that supports the new theory, while wilfully ignoring all information that contradicts the new theory, is unacceptable in true science.

The point is: with new scientific theories other scientists are expected to **look for facts that disprove the new theory**, rather than looking for ways to endorse the new theory. True science demands a very critical approach to new ideas. And if the new ideas are indeed correct, then such a critical approach by other scientists will only solidify the new ideas, because they will be unable to factually oppose the new ideas.

This same approach needs to also be applied in the Church when new doctrinal explanations are presented to God’s people.

When in the Church new doctrinal explanations are put forward, then it is our responsibility to **try to honestly disprove those new explanations**. Honest examination of new teachings is essential. But honest examination will also acknowledge when it is unable to disprove the new explanation, when it can only conclude the new teaching to be biblically correct.

To not acknowledge the truth after such an attempt to disprove the new explanation has failed reveals a lack of integrity, a refusal to acknowledge facts which we personally wish were not correct. Refusing to acknowledge facts we don’t like destroys whatever integrity had existed before such a refusal.

The priest Eli was for all intents and purposes “a good guy” until his own sons became evil and perverse. Because as high priest he was responsible for other priests under his authority, not dealing with his sons destroyed Eli’s integrity before God. And God pronounced a serious punishment for Eli.

The same thing happens to spiritual leaders in God’s Church, who refuse to deal with facts they wish weren’t true. **Keeping the Sabbath and all the Holy Days does not change this situation in any way.**

## **ONE APPROACH TO GUARD AGAINST**

Finally, there is one approach that people frequently take when they present new explanations, which new approach is not really kosher. And that approach is as follows.

Let's take the Church's explanation for a Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday evening resurrection explanation as an example:

- 1) The Church has examined all the Scriptures in the gospels that present information about the crucifixion and the resurrection.
- 2) In the process the Church has provided an explanation for each verse that applies to these two events.
- 3) And the conclusion presented is that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Wednesday, and died shortly before sunset. He was then laid in the tomb around sunset time, Wednesday evening.
- 4) Thursday was the Holy Day, an annual Sabbath, the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So everybody rested on that Thursday. That was the day after the Passover. It was an annual Sabbath.
- 5) Friday the women bought the raw ingredients for the spices for the embalming and prepared them (a strenuous task). Then they finished those preparations shortly before sunset. It was too late to do any embalming.
- 6) Saturday they rested for the weekly Sabbath.
- 7) At sunset on Saturday evening the first day of the new week started. And after sunset on that Saturday evening, before it got really dark, the women went to the tomb, to make sure they would easily find it when they planned to return very early the following morning (i.e. Sunday morning before sunrise).
- 8) But when they checked out the location of the tomb on that Saturday evening some time after sunset, Jesus Christ was already risen.

That's the basic outline of events. You can easily fill in more details, and tie all of the relevant verses to specific parts of this sequence. So that is the explanation the Church has presented for many years.

**Then someone comes along and proposes completely different days for the crucifixion and the resurrection.** And they may demand that you examine their ideas.

But here is what they do. Note! This is the key!

They present **an alternate explanation** for their rundown of events.

What have they done? They have assigned a different explanation for each of the relevant verses in our above scenario. And they expect you to either accept their explanation, or to prove their explanation wrong. It goes without saying that the explanations they present are far from clear-cut.

So should you then examine their premises and refute their arguments?

Only if you have tons of time to spare. Why?

**Their approach is not an honest one!**

Instead of disproving the existing teaching **all they have done is present an alternative explanation.** That's all!

But an "alternative explanation" is not the same as disproving the existing explanation. And "an alternative explanation" is nothing more than an argument! They argue against the accepted explanation.

But they have not presented any proof why or how the existing explanation is supposedly wrong. No, they simply assert that their explanation is right, and they demand that you show them where they are wrong.

What they should have done but don't do, because they have no scriptural support, is the following:

**They need to prove the existing teaching wrong** by doing the following:

1) examining every Scripture that the Church has presented for the Wednesday explanation, and show two things: a) why it supposedly does not apply as the Church has explained, and b) what each Scripture actually **does** mean, and how it **does** apply.

2) The same then also goes for every Scripture that applies to every other day in that rundown, up till Sunday morning. In each case they must show why each verse does not mean what the Church has stated, and then also show what each verse does mean, and how it does apply.

The key in this process is that we should in most cases not give any serious considerations to "alternate explanations" until after the existing explanation has been proved to be in error.

People with new ideas want us to seriously examine their ideas. But they don't make any attempt to



prove our existing explanation to be wrong. If they don't make any effort to prove our existing understanding to be wrong, then we should not engage in any alternate arguments they may present.

The pressure is not on us to prove our existing understanding to be true; and the pressure is not on us to find the flaws in their alternate explanation. **The pressure is first and foremost on them to prove, step by step, that our existing explanation is not correct.** Presenting an alternate explanation is never the same as proving the existing explanation to be wrong.

So when we are confronted with new explanations for certain teachings, we need to be aware of this tactic that is used fairly commonly. Don't be persuaded by "alternate explanations" that make no attempt to first disprove the established explanation for specific teachings, before presenting their new way of explaining the Scriptures.

First people always need to prove why what we currently believe is wrong. Only after it has been proved that something we believe or do is wrong, can a new explanation be evaluated. Otherwise the new idea is nothing more than an argument.

Anyway, enough for this specific approach to introducing new teachings.

Our integrity is our most valuable possession. It is not only an expression of our obedience to God's laws right now; it is also an expression of our commitment to always obey God's laws in the future that still lies ahead of us. We need to treasure our integrity and guard it. And we must not allow our integrity to be compromised, by an unwillingness to acknowledge facts that we cannot disprove.

Frank W Nelte