

“How Do We Use Critical Thinking with the Bible?”

I was involved in a religious cult for a number of years and am still seeking. I've done lots of bible reading and have shared thoughts with many, many people. After reading some info on your site, I was left wondering: If a person takes the bible as the written word, how can it be that critical thinking would have to be applied? Does it not say “My sheep know my voice?”

My chief concern is that it would seem the most simple-minded person should be able to hear the truth and recognize it. Otherwise, truth is only for the intelligent. Does it really need to be that complicated?

Dear _____,

First of all, praise God for bringing you out of the cult! A dear friend of mine is still working through the lies that marked her life because of a cult's influence on her entire family. I am so glad you have supernatural assistance available to you for working through the differences between the lies and the truth, the deception and the light, just for the asking!

I think of critical thinking as a filter through which we examine truth claims. We ask questions of people and writings to find out if they are reliable—questions like,

- *What do you mean by that? (Defining terms)*
- *Where do you get your information?*
- *How do you know this is true?*
- *What if you're wrong?*

When it comes to the Bible, which claims to be the very word

of God, these questions are still helpful. "What do you mean by that?" is an important question to ask when we come to the text. We need to discern whether something is literal or figurative, historical or poetic or prophetic. That's why it's so important to read and study the WHOLE Bible and not just verses here and there. The writers (and God inspiring the writers) had a definite meaning in mind when they wrote down the biblical text, and it's important for us to bring our understanding in line with their intent. For instance, when Jesus said, "I am the vine," did He mean He was green and stringy? Or was He speaking in figurative language? When we read the rest of John and see that He drew analogies a lot to help us understand spiritual truth, we can see that He wasn't speaking literally at this point.

The answer to the question, "Where do you get your information?" is that the Bible is revelation. God speaks to us from "outside the box," so to speak, from His throne in heaven to us down on earth, giving us perspective and understanding we could never figure out on our own. The Bible claims to be God's own thought, feelings and words, and the worldview that results from reading the Bible is more consistent with reality than any other worldview.

When we look at the reliability of the biblical documents, we can see that we can trust that the Bible we have today has been reliably handed down from the original documents (or very very close). The support for the Bible being the actual word of God is so strong that it answers the question "How do you know this is true?" We have several articles on the issue of biblical reliability that I invite you to read and enjoy:

[Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#)

[Authority of the Bible](#)

[How I Know Christianity is True](#)

I think you make an excellent point about even the most

simple-minded person being able to recognize truth and respond to it. That's one of the things I personally love about a relationship with Christ and reading and studying the Bible: God has communicated to us very clearly on the most important issues, while still tantalizing us with the unfathomable depths of His mind and spirit to keep us interested for all eternity.

The fact that mentally retarded children can understand that Jesus is God's Son, He loves them and came to die on the cross in their place, and then choose to trust Him as Savior and Lord, shows me that the most basic and essential truths are accessible to everyone.

Thanks for writing!

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