

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

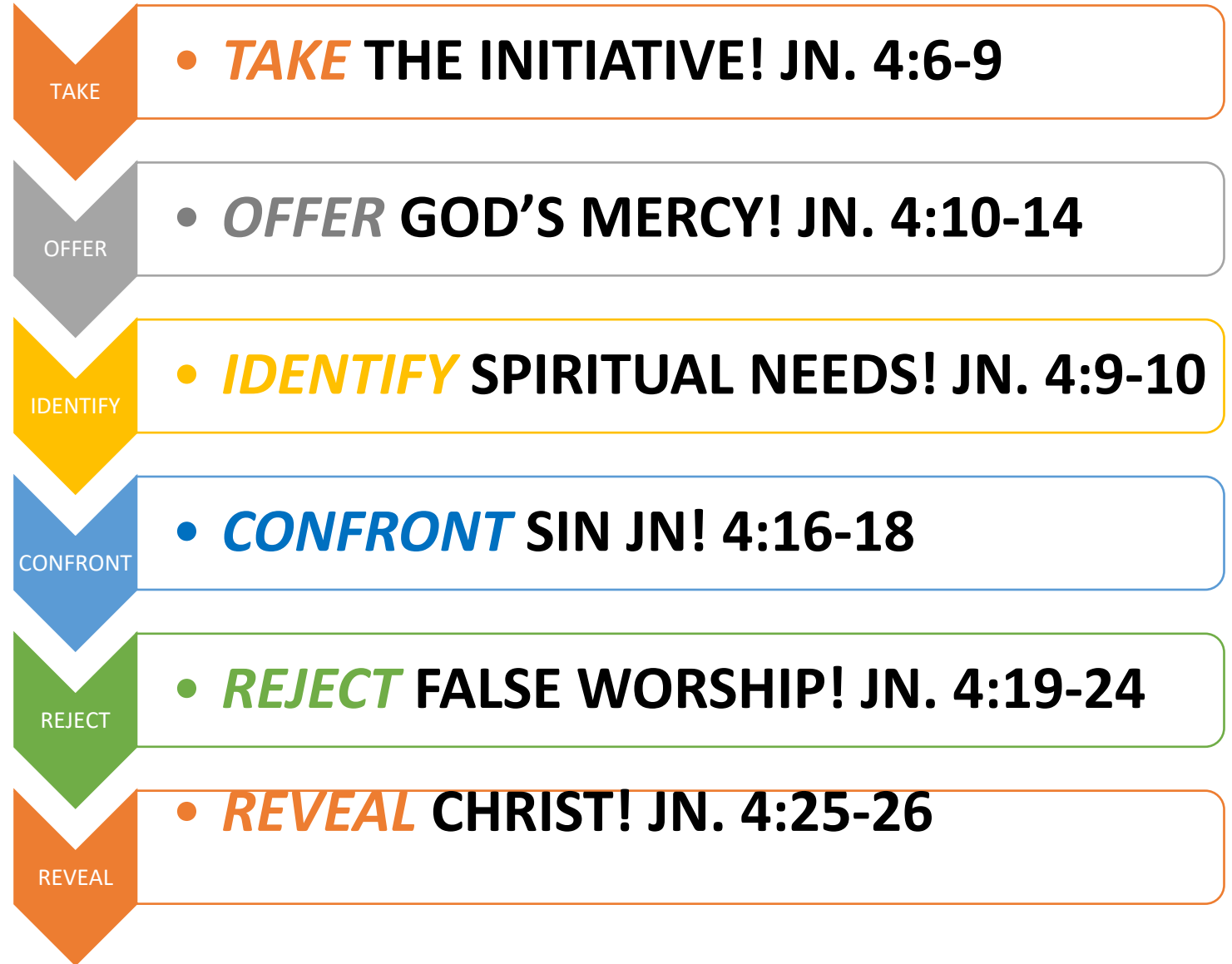


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out, some resting on the ground and others draped over the stone walls of an old building. The stone is dark and weathered, with some green moss or lichen visible. The background shows more of the ruins and some green foliage. The overall scene is one of nature reclaiming old human structures.

THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

PRINCIPLES
FOR
BIBLICAL
EVANGELISM
FOUND IN
JOHN 4, “THE
WOMAN AT
THE WELL.”



I. ALL THAT **GLITTERS** IS NOT **GOLD**.

II. THE VALUE OF **DISCRIMINATION**

- **JUDGE** EVERYTHING.
- **CLING** TO WHAT IS GOOD.



#2 CLING TO WHAT IS GOOD.

- **CHRISTIANITY** is not a passive or purely academic religion. God's Word calls us to action and investigation concerning all truth claims: ***"Examine everything carefully; HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD; abstain from every form of evil"*** (1 THESS. 5:21–22).
- Now that we know what it means to ***"EXAMINE EVERYTHING"*** and ***discriminate*** between truth and error, right and wrong, good and bad. Once that division has been made, we need to ***RESPOND BY EITHER EMBRACING WHAT IS GOOD OR REJECTING WHAT IS EVIL***.
- ***"HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD"*** (1 THESS. 5:21) is an echo of (ROM. 12:9): ***"ABHOR WHAT IS EVIL; CLING TO WHAT IS GOOD."*** The expressions ***"HOLD FAST"*** or ***"CLING TO"*** speak of ***JEALOUSLY SAFEGUARDING THE TRUTH***.

- It cannot be reconciled with the opinion that *hard truths should be downplayed* to make God's Word more palatable for *unbelievers*. It is contrary to the notion that personal experience takes precedence over **OBJECTIVE TRUTH**.

GOD HAS GIVEN US HIS TRUTH OBJECTIVELY IN HIS WORD. IT IS A TREASURE THAT WE SHOULD PROTECT AT ALL COSTS.

- This is the opposite of undiscerning faith. **PAUL** makes no place for a blind, irrational faith that refuses to consider the authenticity of its object and just accepts at face value everything that claims to be true.
- **HE RULES OUT THE KIND OF "FAITH"** that is driven by **FEELINGS, EMOTION**, and the **HUMAN IMAGINATION**. Instead, we are to identify **"WHAT IS GOOD"** by examining **EVERYTHING CAREFULLY, OBJECTIVELY, AND RATIONALLY—USING SCRIPTURE AS OUR STANDARD**.

- ***NO HUMAN TEACHER, NO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, NO STRONG FEELING IS EXEMPT FROM THIS OBJECTIVE TEST.***
- ***JAY ADAMS*** writes, ***“IF INSPIRED PROPHECIES IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE HAD TO BE SUBJECTED TO TESTING . . . THEN SURELY THE TEACHINGS OF MEN TODAY SHOULD ALSO BE PUT TO THE TEST.”*** Indeed, if the words of prophets in apostolic times needed to be examined and evaluated, then surely, we ought to subject the words of ***SELF-PROCLAIMED “PROPHETS”*** and ***PREACHERS*** today to even more intense scrutiny in the bright light of the completed New Testament.
- The same is true of every ***SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE*** and ***EVERY EMOTION. EXPERIENCE AND FEELINGS—NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL—DO NOT DETERMINE WHAT IS TRUE.***

RATHER, THOSE THINGS THEMSELVES **MUST BE SUBJECTED TO THE TEST.**

- ***“THAT WHICH IS GOOD”*** is truth that accords with God’s Word. The word ***“GOOD”*** is ***KALOS***, meaning something that is inherently good. It isn’t just something that is fair to look at, lovely or beautiful in appearance. This speaks of something good in itself—genuine, true, noble, right, and good.
- In other words, ***“THAT WHICH IS GOOD”*** does not refer to that which is **entertaining**. It does not refer to that which **garners accolades** from the world. It does not refer to that which is **satisfying to the flesh**.

IT REFERS TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD, TRUE, ACCURATE, AUTHENTIC, DEPENDABLE—THAT WHICH IS IN AGREEMENT WITH THE INFALLIBLE WORD OF GOD.

#3 *SHUN* WHAT IS *EVIL*.

- *EVIL IS ALWAYS DANGEROUS*, but it isn't always *OBVIOUS*. Its most sinister forms usually require careful discernment. That's why *PAUL* included a negative command when instructing Christians to be discerning: ***“EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY; HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD; ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL”*** (1 THESS. 5:21-22).
- The word translated ***“ABSTAIN”*** is a very strong verb, *APECHŌ*, meaning to “hold oneself back,” “keep away from,” or “shun.” It is the same word used in (1 THESS. 4:3), ***“ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY,”*** and (1 PET. 2:11), ***“ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS.”*** It calls for a radical separation from ***“EVERY FORM OF EVIL.”*** This would include evil behavior, of course. But in this context, the primary reference seems to be ***EVIL TEACHING—FALSE DOCTRINE***.

- Having examined everything in light of God's Word, when you identify something that does **NOT** measure up—something that is **evil, untrue, erroneous**, or contrary to **sound doctrine—SHUN IT.**
- **SCRIPTURE DOES NOT GIVE BELIEVERS PERMISSION TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES TOO EVIL.** Some people believe the only way to defend against false doctrine is to study it, become proficient in it, and master all its nuances—then refute it. There are people who study the cults more than they study sound doctrine. Some Christians immerse themselves in the **philosophy, entertainment, and culture.** They feel such a strategy will strengthen their **witness to unbelievers.**
- But the emphasis of that strategy is **ALL WRONG. OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE ON KNOWING THE TRUTH. ERROR IS TO BE SHUNNED.**
- Granted, we cannot recede into a monastic existence to escape exposure to every evil influence. **BUT NEITHER ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE EXPERTS ABOUT EVIL.**

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- The **APOSTLE PAUL** wrote, ***“I WANT YOU TO BE WISE IN WHAT IS GOOD AND INNOCENT IN WHAT IS EVIL”*** (ROM. 16:19).
 - **FEDERAL AGENTS** don’t learn to spot counterfeit money by studying forgeries. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when they see bogus money, they recognize it. Detecting a spiritual counterfeit requires the same discipline. **MASTER THE TRUTH TO REFUTE ERROR**. Don’t spend time studying error; shun it. Study truth. Hold fast the faithful Word. Then you will be able both to **EXHORT** in sound doctrine and to **REFUTE** those who contradict (**TITUS. 1:9**). As **PAUL** wrote elsewhere, ***“DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD”*** (ROM. 12:21).

- In the King James Version, (1 THESS. 5:22) is translated ***“ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.”*** The word translated ***“APPEARANCE”*** is *EIDOS*, literally ***“THAT WHICH IS SEEN.”*** The New American Standard Bible and English Standard Version translation, ***“EVERY FORM OF EVIL,”*** gives the better sense. We are to reject evil however it appears, to shun every manifestation of it.
- This explicitly rules out ***SYNCRETISM***. Syncretism is the practice of blending ideas from different religions and philosophies. I read about a man who compared his view of spirituality to a ***QUILT***—different ideas from different religions made up his own personal patchwork of faith. He devoured materials from every cult and denomination, looking for good in all of it. Whatever he deemed good, he absorbed for his belief system. He was designing his own unique religion based on ***syncretism***. ***“YOU CAN’T DO THAT!”***

- That man might attempt to use **(1 THESS. 5:21)** to justify his **METHODOLOGY**:
“EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY; HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD.”
That is, after all, precisely what he thought he was doing. But he was actually doing the opposite of what this passage demands. **VERSE 21** is balanced by **VERSE 22**: ***“ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL.”***
“THE ONLY PROPER RESPONSE TO FALSE TEACHING IS TO SHUN IT.”
- **ERRONEOUS DOCTRINE** is no place to look for truth. There is usually some point of truth even in rank heresy. But it is truth out of balance, corrupted truth, truth mixed with lies and therefore rendered dangerous. Shun it.
- **SATAN IS SUBTLE**. He often sabotages the truth by mixing it with error. Truth mixed with error is usually far more effective and far more destructive than a straightforward contradiction of the truth.

- If you think everything you **READ** or **HEAR** on **CHRISTIAN RADIO** and **TELEVISION** is reliable teaching, then you are a prime target for **DOCTRINAL DECEPTION**.
- If you think everyone who **APPEARS TO LOVE THE TRUTH** really does, then you don't understand the wiles of Satan. **"SATAN DISGUISES HIMSELF AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT,"** PAUL wrote. **"THEREFORE, IT IS NOT SURPRISING IF HIS SERVANTS ALSO DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"** (2 COR. 11:14-15).
- **SATAN** also disguises his lies as truth. He doesn't always wage war openly against the gospel. He is much more likely to attack the church by infiltrating with **SUBTLE ERROR**. He uses the **TROJAN HORSE** stratagem by placing his false teachers **IN THE CHURCH**, where they can **"SECRETLY INTRODUCE DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES"** (2 PET. 2:1).

- **HE** puts his lies in the mouth of someone who **CLAIMS TO SPEAK FOR JESUS CHRIST**—someone likable and appealing; then he spreads his perverse lies in the church where they can draw away Christ's disciples (**ACTS. 20:30**).
- **HE** attaches **BIBLE VERSES** to his lies (**MATT. 4:6**). He uses deception and hypocrisy. He disguises falsehood as truth. **HE LOVES SYNCRETISM. IT MAKES EVIL LOOK GOOD**.
- That's why we are to **EXAMINE EVERYTHING** carefully and shun whatever is **UNSOUND, CORRUPT, or ERRONEOUS**. It is deadly. Millions in the church today are being overwhelmed by the **TROJAN-HORSE PLOY** calling for the **integration** of secular ideas with biblical truth.
- **OTHERS ARE EASILY DUPED BY ANYTHING LABELED CHRISTIAN**. They don't examine everything. They don't hold fast to the truth. And they won't shun evil. **THEY ARE LEFT VULNERABLE TO **FALSE DOCTRINE** AND HAVE **NO DEFENSE AGAINST THEOLOGICAL CONFUSION****.

- The **APOSTLE PAUL'S** clear teaching in **(1 THESS. 5:21-22)** cannot simply be avoided or ignored. As in the days of the early church, **DOCTRINAL ERROR** is all around us. Often it looks very good—that's why so many fall prey to its deception. And that is also **WHY GOD GAVE US HIS WORD**, so that we would have a measuring stick by which to examine **every spiritual** or **theological message** we encounter.
- **SCRIPTURE** makes it clear that this type of examination is inherently loving, as **GOD'S PEOPLE ARE CALLED TO THINK BIBLICALLY AND EXERCISE DISCERNMENT**.
- To do anything less will only result in **SPIRITUAL ANEMIA (HOSEA 4:6)**. As **YOU** encounter any doctrinal teaching, be like the **BEREANS** who were more noble because they were **"EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY TO SEE WHETHER THESE THINGS WERE SO"** (ACTS. 17:11).