

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

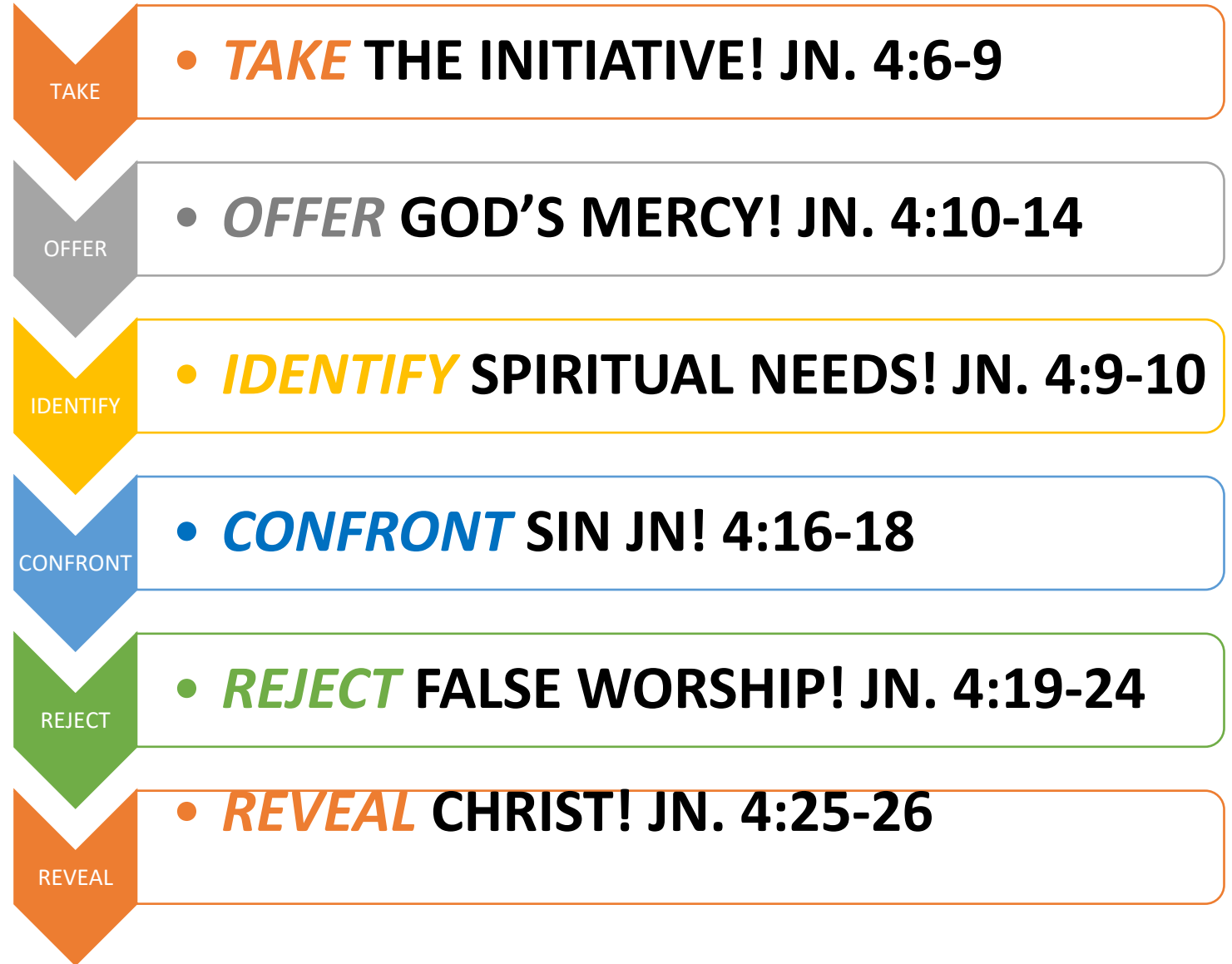


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out over the ground and the ruins. The background shows more stone structures and lush green foliage.

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.
- **SHUN** WHAT IS **EVIL**.

III. OUR DUTY TO **DISCERN**.

- **DISCERNMENT** DEMANDS **HUMILITY**.
- THE **SOURCE** AND **SUPPLY** OF ALL **DISCERNMENT**.



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- THE DEADLY DANGERS OF PASSIVE DISCERNMENT.
 - FOLLOWING THE FAITHFUL.
 - SPIRIT-POWERED DISCERNMENT.

GROWING IN DISCERNMENT.

- ***HOW DO YOU MEASURE MATURITY?*** It is not a function of how old you are—society is dominated by multiple generations of immature adults who refuse to act their age. Maturity is tested by time, but it's not a question of how long a person has lived. Rather, ***IT'S DETERMINED BY HOW WISELY HE OR SHE LIVES.***
- The same is true in the ***SPIRITUAL REALM***. It doesn't matter how long a person has sat under the teaching of God's Word if his life is still dominated by fickle ***EMOTIONALISM, FOOLISH WORLDLINESS,*** and ***SHALLOW SPIRITUALITY.***
EXPOSURE TO THE WORD ALONE WON'T MAKE US MATURE CHRISTIANS—WE MUST BE FAITHFUL AND DISCIPLINED TO PUT IT TO WORK IN OUR LIVES.

- **PUT SIMPLY, *SPIRITUAL MATURITY* IS THE PROCESS OF LEARNING TO DISCERN**. In fact, the path to real discernment is the path to spiritual growth—and vice versa. ***GROWTH IN GRACE IS AN ONGOING PROCESS THROUGHOUT THIS EARTHLY LIFE***. No Christian ever reaches complete maturity this side of heaven: ***“NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE; NOW I KNOW IN PART, BUT THEN I WILL KNOW FULLY JUST AS I ALSO HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN”*** (1 COR. 13:12).
- We must continually ***“GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST”*** (2 PET. 3:18). We should hunger ***“FOR THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, SO THAT BY IT [WE] MAY GROW”*** (1 PET. 2:2).
- As we mature, our senses are exercised to discern good and evil (HEB. 5:14). As we cease to be children, we gain stability (EPH. 4:14-15).

MATURE PEOPLE ARE DISCERNING PEOPLE.

- ***WE KNOW THIS FROM THE NATURAL WORLD***. The bulk of every parent's responsibility is training children to be discerning. We continually do it, even when our kid's become teenagers. We help them **think** through issues, **understand** what is wise and unwise, and **prompt** them to make the right choices. ***WE HELP THEM DISCERN***. In fact, the goal of parenting is to raise a **discerning child**. It doesn't happen automatically, and it doesn't occur without diligent, lifelong instruction.
- ***THE SAME IS TRUE SPIRITUALLY***. You don't pray for discernment and suddenly wake up with abundant wisdom. ***IT IS A PROCESS OF GROWTH***.
- ***STAY ON THE PATH OF MATURITY***. Sometimes it involves **suffering** and **trials** (JAMES 1:2-4; 1 PET. 5:10). Often it necessitates **divine chastening** (HEB. 12:11). Always it requires **personal discipline** (1 TIM. 4:7-8).

BUT THE REWARDS ARE RICH:

“HOW BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO FINDS WISDOM AND THE MAN WHO GAINS UNDERSTANDING. FOR HER PROFIT IS BETTER THAN THE PROFIT FROM SILVER AND HER GAIN BETTER THAN FINE GOLD. SHE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN JEWELS; AND NOTHING YOU DESIRE COMPARES WITH HER. LONG LIFE IS IN HER RIGHT HAND; IN HER LEFT HAND ARE RICHES AND HONOR. HER WAYS ARE PLEASANT WAYS AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE. SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THOSE WHO TAKE HOLD OF HER, AND HAPPY ARE ALL WHO HOLD HER FAST. . . . 21, MY SON, LET THEM NOT VANISH FROM YOUR SIGHT; KEEP SOUND WISDOM AND DISCRETION, 22, SO THEY WILL BE LIFE FOR YOUR SOUL AND ADORNMENT FOR YOUR NECK. 23, THEN YOU WILL WALK IN YOUR WAY SECURELY AND YOUR FOOT WILL NOT STUMBLE.”

(PROVERBS 3:13-18, 21-23)

- And these riches, unlike diamonds, will retain their value and brilliance for all eternity. ***THE ALTERNATIVE IS A LIFE OF THEOLOGICAL **CONFUSION**, WHERE **SPIRITUAL TREASURES ARE CONFUSED WITH SPIRITUAL FAKES.*****

“WHOEVER IS WISE, LET HIM UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS; WHOEVER IS DISCERNING, LET HIM KNOW THEM. FOR THE WAYS OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT, AND THE UPRIGHT WALK IN THEM, BUT TRANSGRESSORS STUMBLE IN THEM.”

(HOSEA 14:9)

- **HOSEA** saw **DISCERNMENT** as necessary for righteousness, and antithetical to those who transgress God’s law. That’s why wisdom is so essential if we want to please the Lord through the way we live.

IF WE ARE TO **CONTINUALLY GROW** IN CONFORMITY TO CHRIST, WE **CANNOT** AFFORD TO **STAGNATE** IN OUR **DISCERNMENT**. IT MUST BE OUR LIFELONG PURSUIT.

WHAT HAVE **WE LEARNED** ABOUT **DISCERNMENT**

1. DEFINITION:

*IT IS THE ABILITY TO TELL THE **DIFFERENCE** BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD, OR GOOD AND EVIL.*

2. GROWTH:

***DISCERNMENT** IS A SKILL THAT GROWS OVER TIME THROUGH SPIRITUAL MATURITY, PRACTICE, AND REGULAR, INTENTIONAL READING OF GOD'S WORD.*

3. SOURCE:

*TRUE **WISDOM** AND THE ABILITY TO JUDGE CORRECTLY IS A **GIFT** FROM **GOD** AND THE GUIDANCE OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**.*

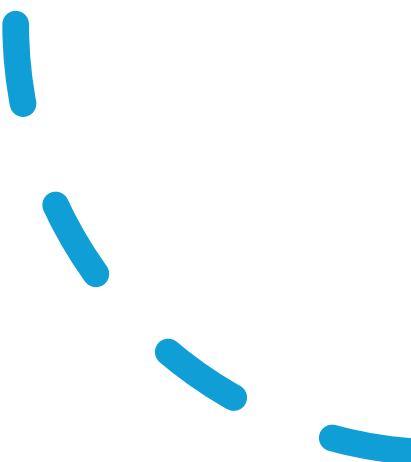
TOP 10 BIBLE VERSES ON DISCERNMENT

1. (PROV. 1:7) ***“THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE; FOOLS DESPISE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION.”***
 - This is the **CORE MAXIM** of the book: the quest for **WISDOM** begins with the ***“FEAR OF THE LORD”*** (cf. Ps. 9:10 and Ps. 111:10).
 - ***“KNOWLEDGE” AND “WISDOM” ARE CLOSELY TIED TOGETHER IN PROVERBS:*** ***“KNOWLEDGE”*** tends to focus on correct understanding of the world and oneself as creatures of the magnificent and loving God, while ***“WISDOM”*** is the acquired skill of ***APPLYING THAT KNOWLEDGE RIGHTLY***, or “skill in the art of godly living”.

- . The reason that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom is that ***THE MORAL LIFE BEGINS WITH REVERENCE AND HUMILITY BEFORE THE MAKER AND REDEEMER.***
- . The idea of a ***QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE*** sets biblical wisdom in the broad context of the ancient Near Eastern quest for truth, and this verse also validates such a quest as legitimate and good. Thus, it affirms a kind of ***“CREATIONAL REVELATION,”*** the idea that ***ONE CAN FIND MORAL AND THEOLOGICAL TRUTH THROUGH OBSERVING THE WORLD.***
- . At the same time, it distinguishes the biblical pursuit of knowledge and wisdom from those of the surrounding cultures, for it asserts that ***SUBMISSION TO THE LORD IS FOUNDATIONAL TO THE ATTAINMENT OF REAL UNDERSTANDING.***

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- By using the **COVENANT NAME “THE LORD”** in preference to the more generic “**GOD**,” this verse makes the point that **TRUTH IS FOUND THROUGH ISRAEL’S GOD**.
 - In addition, the verse asserts that **FOOLS DESPISE** wisdom and instruction, thus setting up the **alternative** between the two ways of wisdom and folly. This contrast dominates the entire book, as the way of **WISDOM, RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and the **FEAR OF THE LORD** is set against the way of **FOLLY, EVIL**, and **SCOFFING**.

2. (PROV. 3:5-6) ***“TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING. 6, IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.”***
- ***TRUST IN THE LORD*** is necessary for fulfilling any of the wise ways of life taught in Proverbs; trusting the Lord is closely connected to “fearing” him
 - ***“WITH ALL YOUR HEART”*** indicates that trust goes *beyond intellectual assent* to a deep reliance on the Lord, ***A SETTLED CONFIDENCE IN HIS CARE AND HIS FAITHFULNESS TO HIS WORD.***
 - ***“DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING”*** further explains ***TRUSTING*** in the Lord. One’s ***“UNDERSTANDING”*** in Proverbs is his perception of the right course of action. The wise will govern themselves by what the Lord himself declares and ***WILL NOT SET THEIR OWN FINITE AND OFTEN-MISTAKEN UNDERSTANDING AGAINST HIS.***

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- . ***“HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATH STRAIGHT,”*** means to make the course of the person’s life one that continually progresses toward a goal.
 - . **IN PROVERBS, THE EMPHASIS IS ON THE MORAL QUALITY OF ONE’S LIFE PATH (HERE, ITS MORAL “STRAIGHTNESS”).**
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3. (JAMES. 1:5) ***“BUT IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, LET HIM ASK OF GOD, WHO GIVES TO ALL GENEROUSLY AND WITHOUT REPROACH, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO HIM.”***
- ***BELIEVERS ARE TO HAVE AN UNDIVIDED FAITH***, asking for wisdom from their ever-wise and all-generous God. James addresses the believer who lacks wisdom in handling trials.
 - ***WISDOM***, as in the Old Testament, ***IS A GOD-GIVEN AND GOD-CENTERED DISCERNMENT REGARDING THE PRACTICAL ISSUES IN LIFE.***
 - ***WISDOM*** comes from ***PRAYER*** for God’s help. ***GOD GIVES GENEROUSLY*** (with “***SINGLE-MINDED***” liberality) and without reproach (***HE DOES NOT WANT ANYONE TO HESITATE TO COME TO HIM.***

4. (EPH. 5:6-10) **“LET NO ONE DECEIVE YOU WITH EMPTY WORDS, FOR BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS THE WRATH OF GOD COMES UPON THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE. 7, THEREFORE, DO NOT BE PARTAKERS WITH THEM; 8, FOR YOU WERE FORMERLY DARKNESS, BUT NOW YOU ARE LIGHT IN THE LORD; WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT. 9, (FOR THE FRUIT OF THE LIGHT CONSISTS IN ALL GOODNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH), 10, TRYING TO LEARN WHAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD.”**

- PAUL IS NOT TELLING **CHRISTIANS** TO AVOID ALL CONTACT WITH **NONBELIEVERS** but to avoid joining with them in their sin. The Bible gives general principles for life, but followers of Christ must use **WISDOM TO DISCERN** how to apply those principles to the concrete issues of their lives.
- Again, such **WISDOM** may be defined as ***“THE SKILL OF GODLY LIVING,”*** which one must thoughtfully **DISCERN**, **APPLY**, and **PRACTICE** in order to live in a way that is **PLEASING TO THE LORD.**

5. (1 JN. 4:1) ***“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.”***
- **CHRISTIAN *FAITH* IS NOT SPIRITUAL GULLIBILITY.** The unseen spiritual influences that guide people’s speech and actions can be ***“TESTED”*** by observing ***THEIR DOCTRINE*** and ***CONDUCT*** as well as by the ***GIFT OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT*** (CF. 1 COR. 12:10; 14:29).
 - ***FALSE PROPHETS*** are people who claim to speak for God but are actually speaking by ***DEMONIC INFLUENCE*** (1 JN. 4:3–4). In today’s age of ***“TOLERANCE,”*** discriminating discernment can be viewed as being judgmental (CF. ***“JUDGE NOT,”*** MATT. 7:1).
 - **YET *JESUS* ALSO TAUGHT, *“DO NOT JUDGE BY APPEARANCES, BUT JUDGE WITH RIGHT JUDGMENT”*** (JN. 7:24).

6. (ROM. 12:2) ***“AND DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, SO THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT THE WILL OF GOD IS, THAT WHICH IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.”***
- ***THE PRESENT EVIL AGE*** still threatens those who belong to Christ, so they must **RESIST** its pressure. Their lives are changed as their minds are made new (**CONTRAST ROM. 1:28**), ***“AND JUST AS THEY DID NOT SEE FIT TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD ANY LONGER, GOD GAVE THEM OVER TO A DEPRAVED MIND, TO DO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT PROPER.”*** so that they are able to ***“DISCERN”*** **GOD’S WILL**.
 - ***“BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN”*** translates Greek ***DOKIMAZŌ***, which often has the sense of **FINDING OUT THE WORTH** of something by putting it to use or testing it in actual practice (**CF. LK. 14:19; 1 COR. 3:13; 2 COR. 8:22; 1 TIM. 3:10**).

7. (JAM. 3:13-18) ***“WHO AMONG YOU IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING? LET HIM SHOW BY HIS GOOD BEHAVIOR HIS DEEDS IN THE GENTLENESS OF WISDOM. 14, BUT IF YOU HAVE BITTER JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION IN YOUR HEART, DO NOT BE ARROGANT AND SO LIE AGAINST THE TRUTH. 15, THIS WISDOM IS NOT THAT WHICH COMES DOWN FROM ABOVE, BUT IS EARTHLY, NATURAL, DEMONIC. 16, FOR WHERE JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION EXIST, THERE IS DISORDER AND EVERY EVIL THING. 17, BUT THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE IS FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE, GENTLE, REASONABLE, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, UNWAVERING, WITHOUT HYPOCRISY. 18, AND THE SEED WHOSE FRUIT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SOWN IN PEACE BY THOSE WHO MAKE PEACE.***

- These verses could be called ***“THE TALE OF TWO CITIES”—THE REALM OF WISDOM*** (framing the passage in JAMES 3:13, 17) contrasted with that of ***SELFISH AMBITION***. The one ***“FROM ABOVE”*** leads to ***“PEACE,”*** while the ***“EARTHLY”*** one leads to ***“DISORDER.”***
- ***WISDOM FOR JAMES IS NOT MERELY INTELLECTUAL BUT ALSO BEHAVIORAL. MEEKNESS*** Gk. ***PRAUTĒS***, (PROW-OOH-TASE) translated ***“GENTLENESS”*** in (GAL. 5:23) was considered weakness by the Greeks, but ***JESUS ELEVATED IT TO A PRIMARY CHRISTIAN VIRTUE*** (MATT. 5:5; 11:29).
 - ***MEEKNESS COMES NOT FROM COWARDICE OR PASSIVITY BUT RATHER FROM TRUSTING GOD AND THEREFORE BEING SET FREE FROM ANXIOUS SELF-PROMOTION***.

8. (MATT. 7:24) ***“THEREFORE EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE AND ACTS ON THEM, MAY BE COMPARED TO A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE ROCK.”***
- A ***PARABLE*** brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close as Jesus calls for his audience to decide between himself and the religious establishment, drawing a dividing line between himself and any other foundation for life.
 - ***THE EVIDENCE OF WHETHER ONE IS TRULY A BELIEVER IS IN WHETHER ONE DOES THE WORDS OF JESUS (CF. JAM. 1:22–23 AND JAM. 2:20–22).***
 - ***DISCIPLES WHO BUILD THEIR LIVES ON THE BEDROCK OF JESUS AND HIS MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ARE TRULY WISE, REGARDLESS OF THE SHIFTING CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS FASHIONS.***

9. (PHILL. 1:9-10) ***“AND THIS I PRAY, THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND STILL MORE AND MORE IN REAL KNOWLEDGE AND ALL DISCERNMENT, 10, SO THAT YOU MAY APPROVE THE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT, IN ORDER TO BE SINCERE AND BLAMELESS UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST.”***
- As **CHRISTIANS** grow in their **UNDERSTANDING** of what it means to **FOLLOW JESUS**, they will increasingly be able to affirm and practice what is excellent.
 - **SUCH JOYFUL OBEDIENCE TO GOD WILL GIVE THEM THE CONFIDENCE OF BEING FOUND PURE AND BLAMELESS WHEN JESUS RETURNS.**
 - This does not imply **INSTANTANEOUS SPIRITUAL PERFECTION** but rather an **INCREASING LIKENESS TO CHRIST**. But fruit of righteousness is not produced in the believer's own power. **BECAUSE THAT FRUIT COMES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, IT WILL RESULT IN THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD.**

10. (ROM. 11:33-36) ***“OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS AND UNFATHOMABLE HIS WAYS! 34, FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35, OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36, FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE THE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN.”***

- ***GOD’S WISDOM AND WAYS*** are far beyond the understanding of human beings, and hence ***HE DESERVES ALL THE GLORY***.
- The words of (ISA. 40:13) teach that no human being knows the mind of the Lord apart from ***REVELATION***, and ***NO ONE CAN SERVE AS GOD’S ADVISER***. Likewise, the majestic words of (JOB 41:11) are a reminder that no one ultimately gives anything to God. Instead, ***EVERYTHING HUMANS HAVE IS A GIFT FROM GOD (1 COR. 4:7)***.



SINCE ALL THINGS ARE **FROM GOD**, AND **THROUGH GOD**, AND **FOR GOD**, IT FOLLOWS THAT HE DESERVES ALL THE GLORY FOREVER.

GOD'S **SAVING PLAN** BRINGS HIM GREAT **HONOR**, **PRAISE**, AND **GLORY** FOREVER AND EVER.