

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

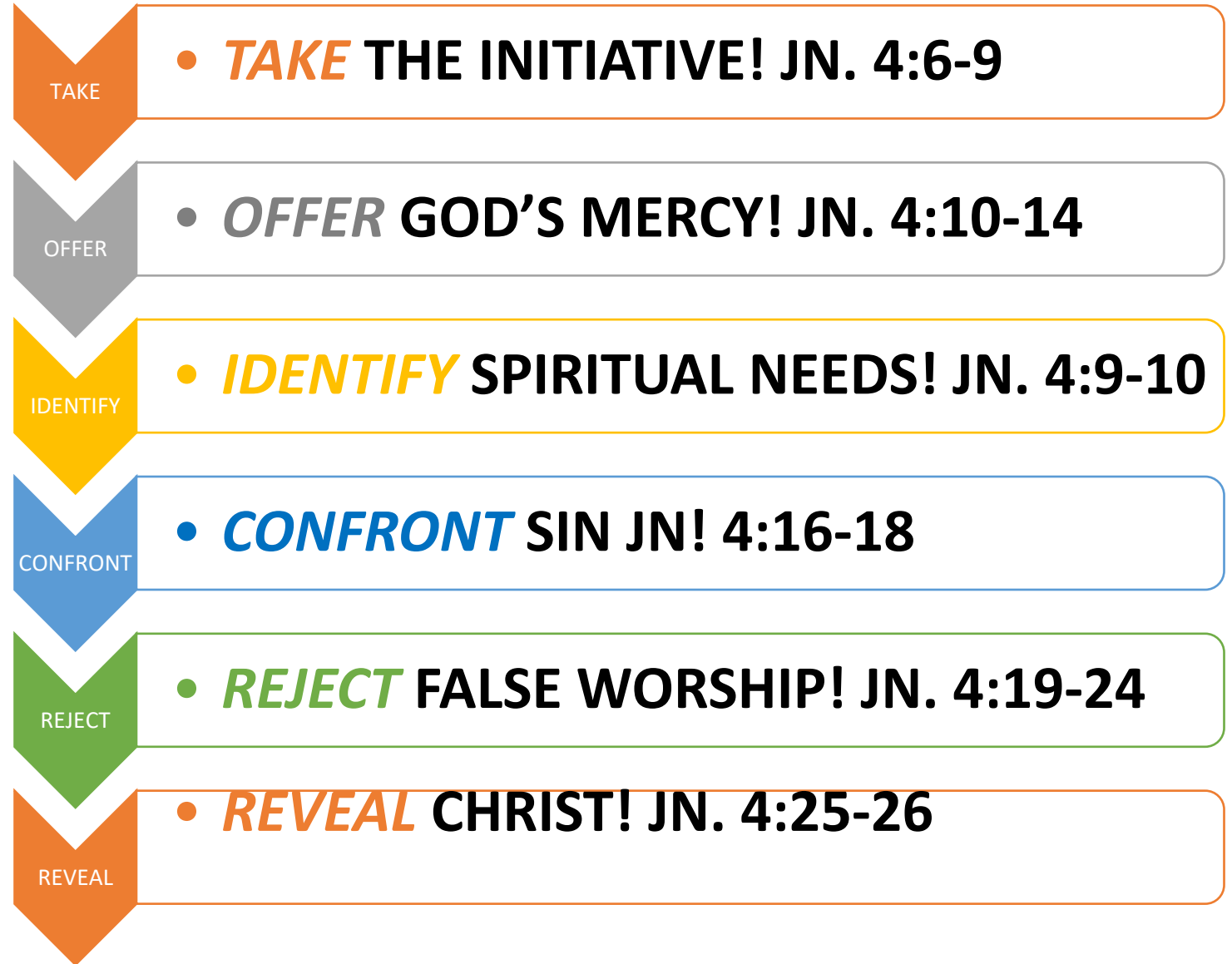


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out, some resting on the ground and others draped over the stone walls of an old building. The stone is weathered and mossy. The background shows more greenery and trees, suggesting a jungle or forest setting. The overall scene is one of nature reclaiming human-made 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.”



ALL THAT *GLITTERS* IS NOT *GOLD*.

- ***EUREKA!*** It is a simple Greek word, only six letters long. But for a generation of treasure seekers in the late **1840s**, it became a life slogan. Meaning “***I HAVE FOUND IT!***” in English, the term purportedly comes from Archimedes, the Greek mathematician who cried out “***EUREKA! EUREKA!***” when he determined how much gold was in King Hiero’s crown.
- Yet, for ***JAMES MARSHALL*** (who discovered gold at Sutter’s Mill in 1848) and many of his contemporaries, the term took on new meaning. For them, “***EUREKA***” meant instant riches, early retirement, and a life of carefree ease. It’s no wonder California (**the “Golden State”**) includes this term on its official seal, along with the picture of a zealous gold miner.

- News of Marshall's discovery spread quickly throughout the nation. By **1850** over **75,000** hopefuls had traveled to California by land, and another **40,000** by sea.
- Whether by wagon or by boat, the journey was an arduous one, as adventurers left friends and family behind in search of vast fortunes. Even when they finally arrived in **San Francisco**, the closest goldfields were still 150 miles away. Undaunted nonetheless, many of the forty-niners set up mining camps and started to dig.
- As they traveled out to their various destinations, prospectors quickly learned that **NOT EVERYTHING THAT LOOKED LIKE GOLD ACTUALLY WAS**. Riverbeds and rock quarries could be full of golden specks, and yet entirely worthless. This ***"FOOL'S GOLD"*** was ***IRON PYRITE***, and miners had to be able to distinguish it from the real thing. Their very livelihood depended on it.

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- **EXPERIENCED MINERS** could usually distinguish **PYRITE** from **GOLD** simply by looking at it. But in some cases, the distinction was not quite so clear. So, they developed tests to discern what was genuine from what wasn't.
 - One test involved **BITING THE ROCK** in question. Real gold is softer than the human tooth, while fool's gold is harder. A broken tooth meant that a prospector needed to keep digging.
 - A second test involved **SCRAPING THE ROCK** on a piece of white stone, such as ceramic. True gold leaves a yellow streak, while the residue left by fool's gold is greenish-black. In either case, a miner relied on tests to authenticate his finds.
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- **DOCTRINALLY SPEAKING**, today's church is in a similar position to the California gold rushers of 1850. **Spiritual riches** are promised at every turn. **New programs, new philosophies, new parachurch** ministries—each glitters a little bit more than the last, promising better results and bigger returns. But as was true in the mid-1800s, just because it glitters doesn't mean it's good.



- Christians need to be equally wary of **"FOOL'S GOLD."** We must not accept new trends (or old traditions) without first **TESTING THEM** to see if they meet with God's approval. If they fail the test, we should discard them and warn others also. But if they pass the test, in keeping with the truth of God's Word, we can embrace and endorse them wholeheartedly.

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- California gold miners would only cry “**EUREKA!**” when they found true gold. As Christians, we should be careful to do the same—to proclaim true doctrine and reject all that is false. For the next several Wednesday night’s, we’ll consider the importance of **CHRISTIAN DISCERNMENT** and highlight the right tools to practice it effectively.

IT’S SO IMPORTANT FOR US TO CULTIVATE THIS VITAL SPIRITUAL GIFT.

THE *VALUE* OF DISCRIMINATION

“THAT’S DISCRIMINATION!”

- What immediately comes to mind when you hear that phrase? It’s almost always a pejorative in the modern vernacular and never confused with a compliment.
- To be accused of discrimination nowadays is overwhelmingly synonymous with the ***SIN OF PARTIALITY***—showing preference for people on the basis of ***GENDER, SKIN COLOR, WEALTH, OR SOCIAL STANDING***.
- But the word itself is **not negative**. ***DISCRIMINATE*** simply means ***“TO MAKE A CLEAR DISTINCTION.”***
- We used to call someone a ***“DISCRIMINATING PERSON”*** ***IF HE OR SHE EXERCISED KEEN JUDGMENT.***

- ***“DISCRIMINATION”*** signified a **positive ability** to draw the line between good and evil, true and false, right and wrong. In the heyday of the American civil rights movement the word was widely applied to ***RACIAL BIGOTRY***. And, indeed, people who make unfair distinctions between races are ***GUILTY OF AN EVIL FORM OF DISCRIMINATION***.
- Unfortunately, the word itself took on that negative connotation, and the sinister implication is often transferred to anyone who tries to discriminate in any way.
- To view ***HOMOSEXUALITY*** as immoral (**1 COR. 6:9-10; 1 TIM. 1:9-10**) is condemned now by the politically correct as an unacceptable form of discrimination.
- To suggest that a man’s wife ought to ***SUBMIT*** to their own husbands (**EPH. 5:22; COL. 3:18**) is now classified as unfair discrimination.

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- To suggest that children ought to **OBEY THEIR PARENTS (EPH. 6:1)** is also labeled unjust discrimination by some. Anyone who **“DISCRIMINATES”** in these ways risks becoming a target of lawsuits by the **ACLU**.
 - The idea of discrimination itself has fallen out of favor. We are not supposed to draw lines. We are not supposed to discriminate. That is the spirit of this age, and unfortunately, it has crept into the church.
 - If we are going to be **DISCERNING PEOPLE**, we must develop the skill of **DISCRIMINATING** between truth and error, good and bad. The original languages of Scripture convey this very idea.
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- The main **HEBREW** word for “**DISCERNMENT**” is **BIN**. The word and its variants are used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It is often translated “**DISCERNMENT,**” “**UNDERSTANDING,**” “**SKILL,**” or “**CAREFULNESS.**” But in the original language it conveys the same idea as our word **DISCRIMINATION**. It entails the idea of making distinctions.
- **JAY ADAMS** points out that the word **BIN** is related to the noun **BAYIN**, which means “**INTERVAL**” or “**SPACE BETWEEN,**” and the preposition **BEN**, “**BETWEEN.**”
- In essence it means to “**SEPARATE THINGS FROM ONE ANOTHER AT THEIR POINTS OF DIFFERENCE IN ORDER TO DISTINGUISH THEM.**”
- **DISCERNMENT**, then, is a synonym for **DISCRIMINATION**. In fact, the Greek verb translated “**DISCERN**” in the New Testament is **DIAKRINŌ**. It means, “**TO MAKE A DISTINCTION**” and is literally translated that way in (**ACTS 15:9.**)

- So, **DISCERNMENT** is the **PROCESS OF MAKING CAREFUL DISTINCTIONS IN OUR THINKING ABOUT TRUTH.**
- The discerning person is the one who draws a clear contrast between truth and error. Discernment is black-and-white thinking—the conscious refusal to color every issue in shades of gray. **NO ONE CAN BE TRULY DISCERNING WITHOUT DEVELOPING SKILL IN SEPARATING DIVINE TRUTH FROM ERROR.**
- Does Scripture tell us **HOW TO BE DISCERNING**? It certainly does. **PAUL** sums up the process in (1 THESS. 5:21-22): **“EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY; HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD; ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL.”**
- There, in **THREE STRAIGHTFORWARD COMMANDS**, he spells out the **REQUIREMENTS OF A DISCERNING MIND.**

#1 **JUDGE** EVERYTHING.

- **FALSE TEACHERS** flourish where there is **NO SCRUTINY**. That's why so many of them set up camp in environments where there is little to no **BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT**—where God's Word is nothing more than a supplement to **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, ANECDOTE, and EMBELLISHMENT**.
- Why do the heavy lifting of careful Bible study when one can simply **“LET GO”** and be drawn into the gravitational pull of a religious guru?
- Our short attention span and quick-fix culture is easily preyed upon by **CHARISMATIC SIDESHOWS, FEEL-GOOD PHILOSOPHY, and the TELEVISION HUCKSTERS** of modern pseudo-Christianity.

- But we are negligent in our Christian duty if we allow that to happen to us and our churches. When the **APOSTLE PAUL** says to **“EXAMINE EVERYTHING”** (1 THESS. 5:21), he is calling on **ALL CHRISTIANS TO PRACTICE CAREFUL BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT IN ALL REALMS OF LIFE.**
- That may surprise some Christians who see discernment as uniquely a **PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY.** It is certainly true that pastors and teachers have an even greater duty to be discerning than the average layperson. Most of the calls to discernment in the New Testament are issued to church leaders (1 TIM. 4:6-7, 13, 16; TITUS 1:9).
- As a matter of fact, **EVERY PASTOR** is **REQUIRED** to be skilled in teaching truth and able to refute unsound doctrine.

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- ***AS A PASTOR***, I am constantly aware of this responsibility. Everything I read, for example, goes through a grid of **DISCRIMINATION** in my mind. I constantly strive to separate truth from error. I read that way, I think that way, and of course I preach that way.
 - My passion is to know the truth and proclaim it with authority. That should be the passion of every ***PASTOR/TEACHER***, because everything we teach affects the hearts and lives of those who hear us. It is an awesome responsibility.
 - **ANY CHURCH LEADER** who does not feel the burden of this duty ***OUGHT TO STEP DOWN FROM LEADERSHIP.***

- But discernment is not **ONLY** the duty of **PASTORS** and **TEACHERS**. The same careful discernment **PAUL** demanded of pastors and teachers is also the duty of **EVERY CHRISTIAN**. (1 THESS. 5:21) is written to **THE ENTIRE CHURCH:**
“EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY.”
- The Greek text is by no means complex. The word **“CAREFULLY”** has been added by the translators to make the sense clear. If we translate the phrase literally, we find it simply says, **“EXAMINE EVERYTHING.”** But the idea conveyed by our word **carefully** is included in the Greek word translated **“EXAMINE,” DOKIMAZŌ.**
- This is a familiar word in the New Testament. Elsewhere it is translated **“ANALYZE,” “TEST,”** or **“PROVE.”** It refers to the process of testing something to **REVEAL ITS GENUINENESS**, such as in the testing of precious metals.

- **PAUL** is urging believers to **SCRUTINIZE EVERYTHING** they hear to see that it is genuine, to distinguish between the true and the false, to separate the good from the evil. In other words, he wants them to examine everything **CRITICALLY**. He is effectively saying, **“JUDGE EVERYTHING.”**
- Typically, someone will be quick to push back against that command citing (MATT. 7:1): **“JUDGE NOT, THAT YOU BE NOT JUDGED.”** As if that somehow rules out any kind of **critical** or **analytical** appraisal of what others believe. Was Jesus forbidding Christians from judging what is taught in His name?
- **OBVIOUSLY NOT.** The spiritual discernment **PAUL** calls for is different from the judgmental attitude **JESUS FORBADE**. In Matthew 7, **JESUS** went on to say, **“FOR IN THE WAY YOU JUDGE, YOU WILL BE JUDGED; AND BY YOUR STANDARD OF MEASURE, IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU...”**

- ***“WHY DO YOU LOOK AT THE SPECK THAT IS IN YOUR BROTHER’S EYE, BUT DO NOT NOTICE THE LOG THAT IS IN YOUR OWN EYE? 4, OR HOW CAN YOU SAY TO YOUR BROTHER, ‘LET ME TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR EYE,’ AND BEHOLD, THE LOG IS IN YOUR OWN EYE? 5, YOU HYPOCRITE, FIRST TAKE THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE, AND THEN YOU WILL SEE CLEARLY TO TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR BROTHER’S EYE.”***
- What **JESUS CONDEMNED** was the **HYPOCRITICAL JUDGMENT** of those who held others to a higher standard than they themselves were willing to live by. He was certainly not suggesting that **ALL** judgment is forbidden.
- In fact, **JESUS INDICATED THAT TAKING A SPECK OUT OF YOUR BROTHER’S EYE IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO—IF **YOU FIRST** GET THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE.**

- Elsewhere in Scripture, ***WE ARE FORBIDDEN TO JUDGE OTHERS' MOTIVES OR ATTITUDES***. We are not able to discern ***“THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE HEART”*** (HEB. 4:12). That is a divine prerogative. **ONLY GOD CAN JUDGE THE HEART, BECAUSE ONLY GOD CAN SEE IT** (1 SAM. 16:7).
- **HE ALONE KNOWS** the secrets of the heart (PSA. 44:21). **HE ALONE** can weigh the motives (PROV. 16:2). And **HE ALONE** ***“WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN THROUGH CHRIST JESUS”*** (ROM. 2:16).
- That is not our role. ***“THEREFORE, DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME, BEFORE THE LORD COMES, WHO WILL BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS NOW HIDDEN IN DARKNESS AND WILL DISCLOSE THE PURPOSES OF THE HEART”*** (1 COR. 4:5).

“WHAT IS FORBIDDEN IS **HYPOCRITICAL** JUDGING AND JUDGING OTHERS' THOUGHTS AND MOTIVES.”