

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

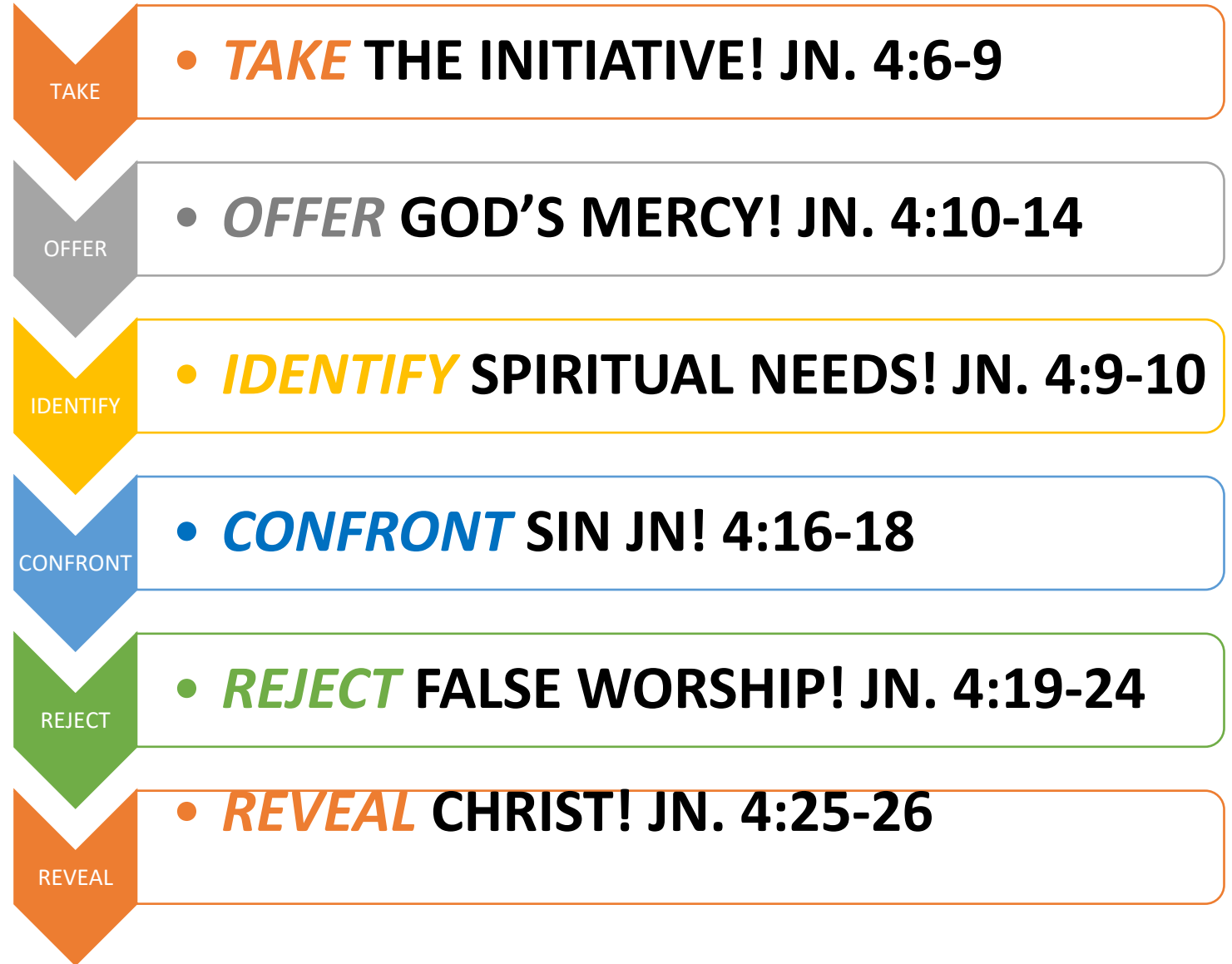




THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

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



ALL THAT *GLITTERS* IS NOT *GOLD*.

- 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.***

- 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.

- 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.”

- But other forms of judgment are explicitly **COMMANDED**. Throughout Scripture the people of God are urged to judge between truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. **JESUS** said, ***“JUDGE WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT”*** (JN. 7:24). **PAUL** wrote to the Corinthian believers, ***“I SPEAK AS TO WISE MEN; YOU JUDGE WHAT I SAY”*** (1 COR. 10:15). Clearly, **GOD REQUIRES US TO BE DISCRIMINATING WHEN IT COMES TO MATTERS OF SOUND DOCTRINE.**
- ***WE ARE ALSO SUPPOSED TO JUDGE ONE ANOTHER WITH REGARD TO OVERT ACTS OF SIN.***
- **PAUL** wrote, ***“DO YOU NOT JUDGE THOSE WHO ARE WITHIN THE CHURCH? BUT THOSE WHO ARE OUTSIDE, GOD JUDGES. ‘REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES’”*** (1 COR. 5:12–13). That speaks of the same process of discipline outlined by **JESUS HIMSELF** in (MATT. 18:15-20).

- At least **ONE OTHER KIND OF JUDGMENT** is expressly required of every believer. We must examine and judge our own selves: **“IF WE JUDGED OURSELVES RIGHTLY, WE WOULD NOT BE JUDGED”** (1 COR. 11:31). This calls for a careful searching and judging of our own **HEARTS**.
- **PAUL** called for this **SELF-EXAMINATION** every time we partake of the **LORD'S SUPPER** (1 COR. 11:28). All other righteous forms of judgment depend on this honest self-examination. That is what Jesus meant when He said, **“FIRST TAKE THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE”** (LK. 6:42).
- Clearly, then, the command in (1 THESS. 5:21) to **“EXAMINE EVERYTHING,”** in no way contradicts the biblical prohibition against being judgmental. The discernment called for here is **DOCTRINAL DISCERNMENT**.

- The **CONJUNCTION** at the beginning of this verse—“**BUT EXAMINE EVERYTHING**”—ties it to the “**PROPHECIES**” mentioned in **VERSE 20**. But this command would certainly include any message that **CLAIMED TO CARRY DIVINE APPROVAL OR AUTHORITY**.
- The unusually gullible **THESSALONIANS** seemed to have a problem in this regard. Like many today, they were eager to believe whatever was preached in the name of Christ. They were indiscriminating. That’s why **PAUL** addresses this **CONTINUAL LACK OF DISCERNMENT** in both of his *Thessalonian epistles*.
- There is evidence in the **FIRST EPISTLE**, for example, that someone had confused the Thessalonians about the **RETURN OF CHRIST**. They were going through a time of severe persecution, and apparently some of them **THOUGHT THEY HAD MISSED THE SECOND COMING**.

- In **CHAPTER 3** we learn that **PAUL** had sent **TIMOTHY** from Athens specifically to **STRENGTHEN** and **ENCOURAGE** them in their faith (**1 THESS. 3:2**). They were unaccountably confused about **WHY** they were being persecuted. **PAUL** had to remind them, ***“YOU YOURSELVES KNOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN DESTINED FOR THIS. FOR INDEED WHEN WE WERE WITH YOU, WE KEPT TELLING YOU IN ADVANCE THAT WE WERE GOING TO SUFFER AFFLICTION”*** (**1 THESS. 3:3-4**).
- Evidently someone had also taught them that believers who died before the Second Coming of Christ would miss that event entirely. They were in serious confusion. **CHAPTERS 4–5** contain Paul’s efforts to correct that confusion.
- He tells them that the dead in Christ will rise and be caught up with the living (**1 THESS. 4:16-17**). And he assures them that although that day will come like a thief in the night (**1 THESS. 5:2**), they need not fear being caught off guard (**1 THESS. 5:3-6**).

- Incredibly, shortly after this, **PAUL** had to write a **SECOND EPISTLE**, again assuring the Thessalonians that they had not missed some great event on the prophetic calendar. Someone, it seems, had sent them a counterfeit epistle claiming to be from Paul and suggesting that the day of the Lord had come already. They should not have been duped by such a ploy because Paul had written so plainly in his first epistle.
- He wrote them again: ***“NOW WE REQUEST YOU, BRETHREN, WITH REGARD TO THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND OUR GATHERING TOGETHER TO HIM, THAT YOU BE NOT QUICKLY SHAKEN FROM YOUR COMPOSURE OR BE DISTURBED EITHER BY A SPIRIT OR A MESSAGE OR A LETTER AS IF FROM US, TO THE EFFECT THAT THE DAY OF THE LORD HAS COME. LET NO ONE IN ANY WAY DECEIVE YOU.”*** (2 THESS. 2:1-3)

THERE WAS NO EXCUSE FOR THEIR CHRONIC **GULLIBILITY**.

- Why were they so vulnerable to false teaching? ***SURELY IT WAS BECAUSE THEY LACKED BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT***. The Thessalonians did not examine everything in light of God's Word. If they had, they would not have been so easily hoodwinked. And that is why ***PAUL*** urged them to ***“EXAMINE EVERYTHING.”***

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***.

- **PAUL** is calling for the same careful watchfulness he demanded of Timothy every time he wrote him: ***“O TIMOTHY, GUARD WHAT HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED TO YOU” (1 TIM. 6:20); “RETAIN THE STANDARD OF SOUND WORDS WHICH YOU HAVE HEARD FROM ME. . . . THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN US, THE TREASURE WHICH HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED TO YOU” (2 TIM. 1:13-14).*** In other words, the truth is given into our custody, and we are charged with guarding it against every possible threat.
- This describes a ***MILITANT, DEFENSIVE, PROTECTIVE STANCE*** against anything that undermines the truth or does violence to it in any way. We must hold the truth securely, defend it zealously, preserve it from all threats.

TO PLACATE THE ENEMIES OF TRUTH OR LOWER OUR GUARD IS TO VIOLATE THIS COMMAND.

- **“HOLD FAST”** also carries the idea of embracing something. It goes beyond bare assent to **“THAT WHICH IS GOOD”** and speaks of loving the truth wholeheartedly. **THOSE WHO ARE TRULY DISCERNING ARE PASSIONATELY COMMITTED** TO SOUND DOCTRINE, TO TRUTH, AND TO ALL THAT IS INSPIRED BY GOD.
- **EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN** has this quality to some degree. **PAUL** even defined salvation as **“LOV[ING] THE TRUTH”** (**2 THESS. 2:10**), and he told the Corinthians they proved their salvation by holding fast to the gospel he had delivered (**1 COR. 15:2**).
- Those who utterly fail to hold fast to the saving message are those who have **“BELIEVED IN VAIN”**; that is, **THEIR FAITH WAS EMPTY TO BEGIN WITH.**

- The **APOSTLE JOHN** said something similar: ***“THEY WENT OUT FROM US, BUT THEY WERE NOT REALLY OF US; FOR IF THEY HAD BEEN OF US, THEY WOULD HAVE REMAINED WITH US; BUT THEY WENT OUT, SO THAT IT WOULD BE SHOWN THAT THEY ALL ARE NOT OF US”*** (1 Jn. 2:19). ALL **TRUE** BELIEVERS **HOLD FAST TO THE GOSPEL.**
- **PAUL** was urging the Thessalonians to **NURTURE AND CULTIVATE THEIR LOVE FOR TRUTH, TO LET IT RULE THEIR THINKING. HE WANTED THEM TO FOSTER A CONSCIOUS COMMITMENT TO ALL TRUTH, A FAITHFULNESS TO **SOUND DOCTRINE**, A PATTERN OF HOLDING FAST TO ALL THAT IS GOOD.**

THE ATTITUDE THIS CALLS FOR IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE SUGGESTION THAT WE SHOULD LAY **DOCTRINE ASIDE FOR THE SAKE OF **UNITY**.**

- 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.