

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

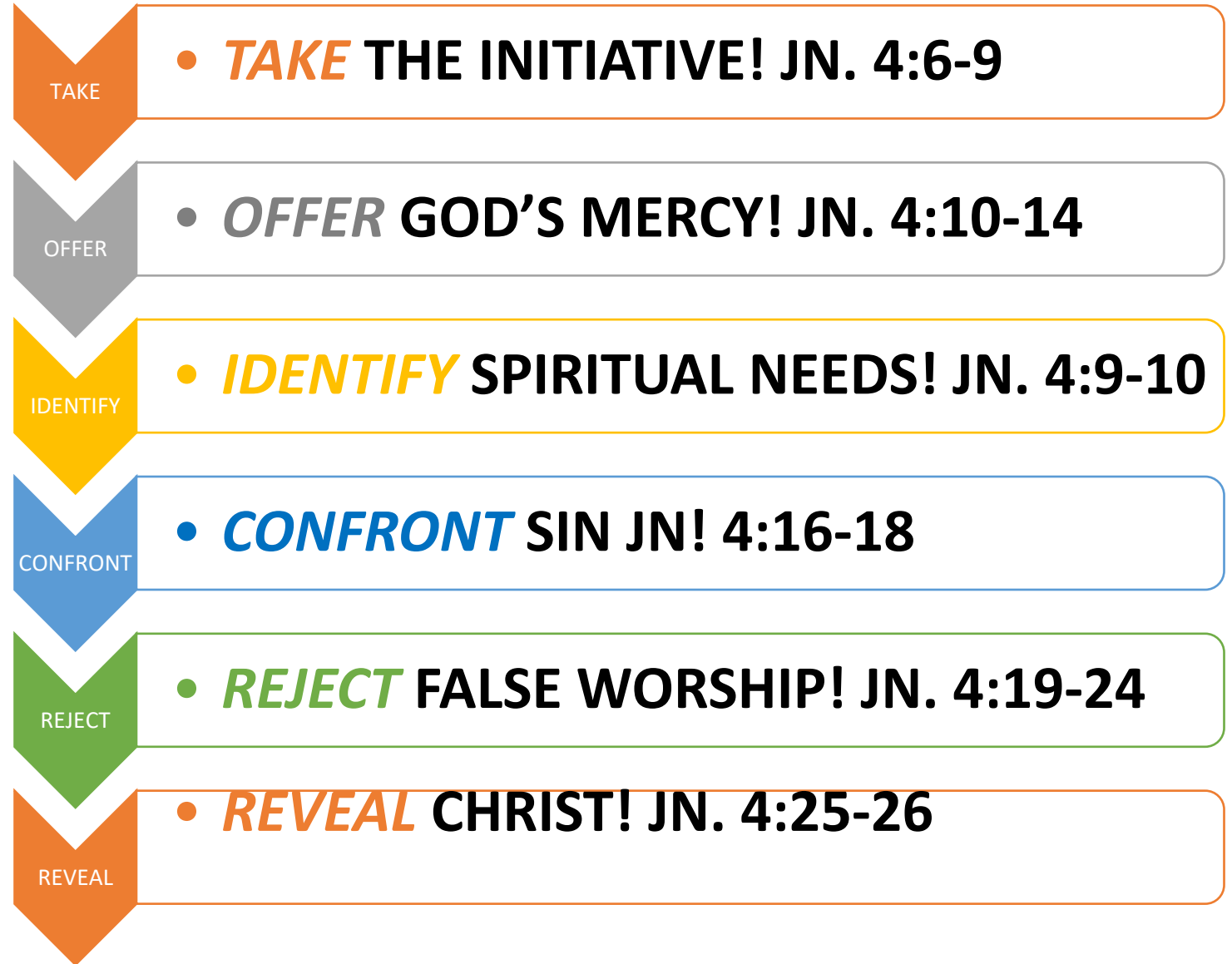


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out over the ground and the ruins. The background shows more stone structures and lush green foliage.

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**.

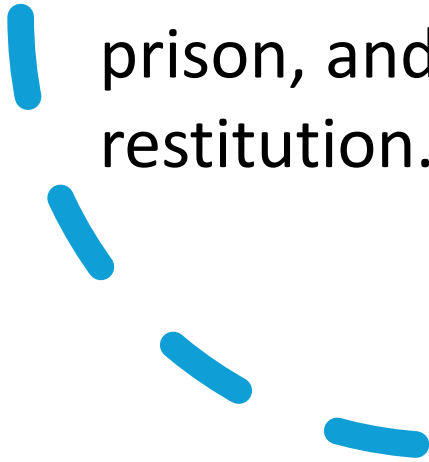
II. THE VALUE OF **DISCRIMINATION**

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



III OUR DUTY TO DISCERN.

- When **ABEN JOHNSON** sold his Detroit-based television station in 1997, he began heavily investing in gemstones. While he had dabbled in diamonds since 1988, he now had the capital he needed to purchase the rarest stones money could buy. He spent three million dollars on a blue diamond called the **STREETER DIAMOND** that **SAM WALTON** (the founder of Wal-Mart) had won in a poker game from a man named Streeter.
- **JOHNSON** spent **\$2.7 million** for a collection of diamonds called the **RUSSIAN BLUES**. Another **seventeen million** dollars was invested in the **SYLVIA WALTON COLLECTION**—a set of diamonds that belonged to **SAM WALTON'S DAUGHTER**. In all, **JOHNSON INVESTED SOME \$83 MILLION IN THE COSTLY GEMS**.

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- But what ***JOHNSON DIDN'T REALIZE*** was that these famous-named diamonds, which he thought were priceless, were actually almost worthless. In fact, they were not diamonds at all. The stones were actually ***CUBIC ZIRCONIA, BLUE TOPAZ, CITRINE***, and other inexpensive gems.
 - To add insult to injury, ***SAM WALTON NEVER HAD A DAUGHTER NAMED SYLVIA***. When Johnson found out that his Florida-based jeweler, ***JACK HASSON***, had bilked him, he filed suit. A year later, in 1999, the FBI arrested Hasson for fraud. In 2000 he was convicted, sentenced to forty years in prison, and ordered to pay more than seventy-eight million dollars in restitution.
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- **DESPITE JOHNSON’S** legal efforts, he will never be able to fully recover his **\$83 million**. If only he had exercised a little **DISCERNMENT** before parting with his millions. Some simple tests of the diamonds by a gemologist or appraiser could have saved Johnson a bundle of money and trouble.
- One test uses a thermal conductivity meter, another an ordinary microscope. Such tests for authenticity certainly seem worth the effort when millions of dollars are at stake. Yet, like **ABEN JOHNSON**, Christians often fall for bait-and-switch ploys, and we have something infinitely more valuable than diamonds at stake—namely, **GOD’S GLORY**.
- Thankfully, by God’s grace we have a **STANDARD** by which to test the authenticity of any incoming religious message. That’s why, even when we are bombarded with **doctrinal frauds** and **spiritual knockoffs**, we need not lose hope. God has not left us defenseless. By arming us with His Word, He has given us everything we need for **“LIFE AND GODLINESS” (2 PET 1:3)**.

- ***OUR RELIANCE ON SCRIPTURE*** becomes more and more crucial every day, as new errors are introduced into the church and as old errors continue to resurface.
- On the one hand, ***“NEW AND IMPROVED” PROGRAMS*** and ***PHILOSOPHIES*** appeal to us with their siren calls. Whether it’s new ways to evangelize or new ways to fill the auditorium, these innovative trends always seem to provide the perfect solution for the church’s present needs. But these new ***“SOLUTIONS,”*** primarily based on ***SECULAR WISDOM*** and driven by whatever works, do not really solve anything.
- By suggesting that the ***“OLD AND ORIGINAL”*** methods of the New Testament are no longer good enough for today, ***THESE THEOLOGICAL TRENDS ARE REALLY JUST WORLDLY PHILOSOPHIES IN RELIGIOUS GARB.***

- On the other hand, ***THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS*** (sometimes centuries old) also vie for our attention. Many of these traditions are good, but some of them are not. And they have been established for almost every aspect of Christian thought, from methods of church government to philosophies of Bible interpretation.
- Unlike their ***“NEW AND IMPROVED”*** counterparts, these historic systems appeal to their distinguished heritage for added credibility. Nonetheless, when these theological legacies begin to replace the clear teachings of Scripture (***as has happened, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church***), the results are disastrous.
- ***SO HOW CAN BELIEVERS DISCERN BETWEEN TRENDS, TRADITIONS, AND THE TRUTH? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION BEGINS WITH SCRIPTURE.***

- **GOD HAS GIVEN US HIS WORD** so that we can evaluate every spiritual message we receive, discriminating between what is right and what is wrong. In **(2 TIM. 3:16-17)**, the **APOSTLE PAUL** said it like this: ***“ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE ADEQUATE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”***
- Do you want to be equipped for every good work? Do you want to be able to teach truth and correct error? If so, you must become a student of Scripture—trusting that God’s Word is a sufficient guide for any problem you encounter.

THE MAZE OF MODERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IS NO MATCH FOR **THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT IN ***“DISCERNING THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE HEART”*** (HEB. 4:12).**

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1. **HOW** CAN YOU BEGIN TO APPLY BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?
 2. **HOW** CAN YOU PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE BATTLE?
 3. **HOW** CAN YOU MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE GUARDING THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD, SO THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FAITHFULLY PASS IT ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION?

DISCERNMENT DEMANDS HUMILITY.

*“IF WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO BE DISCERNING, WE WON’T BE **DISCERNING**.”*

- **(PROV. 2:3-6)** says, *“IF YOU CRY FOR DISCERNMENT, LIFT YOUR VOICE FOR UNDERSTANDING; IF YOU SEEK HER AS SILVER AND SEARCH FOR HER AS FOR HIDDEN TREASURES; THEN YOU WILL DISCERN THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND DISCOVER THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. FOR THE LORD GIVES WISDOM; FROM HIS MOUTH COME KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.”*

- If we are driven by a yearning to be *HAPPY, HEALTHY, AFFLUENT, PROSPEROUS, COMFORTABLE*, and *SELF-SATISFIED*, we will **NEVER BE DISCERNING** people.
- IF OUR **FEELINGS** DETERMINE WHAT WE BELIEVE, WE CANNOT BE **DISCERNING**.
- IF WE SUBJUGATE OUR MINDS TO SOME **EARTHLY ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY** AND BLINDLY BELIEVE WHAT WE ARE TOLD, WE **UNDERMINE DISCERNMENT**.
- UNLESS WE ARE WILLING TO EXAMINE ALL THINGS CAREFULLY, WE **CANNOT** HOPE TO HAVE ANY DEFENSE AGAINST RECKLESS WANDERING FAITH.

THE DESIRE FOR DISCERNMENT, IS A DESIRE BORN OUT OF HUMILITY.

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- IT IS A **HUMILITY** THAT ACKNOWLEDGES OUR OWN POTENTIAL FOR SELF-DECEPTION—*“THE HEART IS MORE DECEITFUL THAN ALL ELSE AND IS DESPERATELY SICK; WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT”* (JER. 17:9).
 - IT IS **HUMILITY** THAT DISTRUSTS PERSONAL FEELINGS AND CASTS SCORN ON SELF-SUFFICIENCY—*“ON MY OWN BEHALF I WILL NOT BOAST, EXCEPT IN REGARD TO MY WEAKNESSES”* (2 COR. 12:5).
 - IT IS **HUMILITY** THAT TURNS TO THE WORD OF GOD AS THE FINAL ARBITER OF ALL THINGS—*“EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY TO SEE WHETHER THESE THINGS WERE SO”* (ACTS 17:11).

- **NO ONE HAS A MONOPOLY ON TRUTH**. I certainly do not. I don't have reliable answers within myself. My heart is as susceptible to self-deception as anyone's. My feelings are as undependable as everyone else's. I am not immune to Satan's deception. That is true for all of us.
- **OUR ONLY DEFENSE AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINE IS TO BE DISCERNING**, to distrust our own emotions, to hold our own senses suspect, to examine all things, to test every truth-claim with the yardstick of Scripture, and to handle the Word of God with great care.
- **THE DESIRE TO BE DISCERNING THEREFORE ENTAILS A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE LINKED WITH AN ENTHUSIASM FOR UNDERSTANDING IT CORRECTLY. GOD REQUIRES THAT VERY ATTITUDE (2 TIM. 2:15).**

SO, THE HEART THAT TRULY LOVES HIM WILL NATURALLY BURN WITH A PASSION FOR DISCERNMENT.

THE *SOURCE* AND *SUPPLY* OF ALL DISCERNMENT.

- IF YOU COULD ASK GOD FOR *ANYTHING*, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?
- We may sometimes fantasize about that question, but for *SOLOMON* it was *REALITY*. When he became king after the death of David, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ***“ASK WHAT YOU WISH ME TO GIVE YOU”*** (1 KINGS. 3:5).
- *SOLOMON* could have requested *ANYTHING*. He could have asked for material riches, power, victory over his enemies, or whatever he liked. But Solomon asked for discernment: ***“GIVE YOUR SERVANT AN UNDERSTANDING HEART TO JUDGE YOUR PEOPLE TO DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL”*** (1 KINGS 3:9). Scripture says, ***“IT WAS PLEASING IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD THAT SOLOMON HAD ASKED THIS THING”*** (1 KINGS 3:10).

- MOREOVER, THE LORD TOLD SOLOMON,

“BECAUSE YOU HAVE ASKED THIS THING, AND HAVE NOT ASKED FOR YOURSELF LONG LIFE, NOR HAVE ASKED RICHES FOR YOURSELF, NOR HAVE YOU ASKED FOR THE LIFE OF YOUR ENEMIES, BUT HAVE ASKED FOR YOURSELF DISCERNMENT TO UNDERSTAND JUSTICE, 12, BEHOLD, I HAVE DONE ACCORDING TO YOUR WORDS. BEHOLD, I HAVE GIVEN YOU A WISE AND DISCERNING HEART, SO THAT THERE HAS BEEN NONE LIKE YOU BEFORE YOU, NOR SHALL ONE LIKE YOU ARISE AFTER YOU. 13, I HAVE ALSO GIVEN YOU WHAT YOU HAVE NOT ASKED, BOTH RICHES AND HONOR, SO THAT THERE WILL NOT BE ANY AMONG THE KINGS LIKE YOU ALL YOUR DAYS. 14, IF YOU WALK IN MY WAYS, KEEPING MY STATUTES AND COMMANDMENTS, AS YOUR FATHER DAVID WALKED, THEN I WILL PROLONG YOUR DAYS.” (1 KINGS 3:11-14)

- Notice that **GOD** COMMENDED SOLOMON because his request was completely **UNSELFISH**: **“BECAUSE YOU HAVE ASKED THIS THING AND HAVE NOT ASKED FOR YOURSELF.”** **SELFISHNESS** is incompatible with true **DISCERNMENT**.

PEOPLE WHO DESIRE TO BE DISCERNING MUST BE WILLING TO STEP OUTSIDE THEMSELVES.

- **MODERN EVANGELICALISM**, enamored with **PSYCHOLOGY** and **SELF-ESTEEM**, has produced a generation of believers so **SELF-ABSORBED THAT THEY CANNOT BE DISCERNING.**

PEOPLE AREN'T EVEN INTERESTED IN DISCERNMENT. THEIR SPIRITUAL FOCUS IS ON SELF AND GETTING THEIR OWN “FELT NEEDS” MET.

- **SOLOMON** did not do that. Although he had an opportunity to ask for long life, personal prosperity, health and wealth, he bypassed all of that and asked for **DISCERNMENT** instead.
- **THEREFORE, GOD ALSO GAVE HIM RICHES, HONOR, AND LONG LIFE FOR AS LONG AS HE WALKED IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD.**
- In the same way, **(JAMES 1:5)** promises us—as New Testament believers—that **GOD IS STILL EAGER TO PROVIDE US WITH THE DISCERNMENT WE SO DESPERATELY NEED: “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” (JAMES 1:5).**

WE CAN ASK HIM FOR DISCERNMENT, AND HE WILL GLADLY SUPPLY IT.

THE **DEADLY** DANGERS OF **PASSIVE** **DISCERNMENT.**

- **KING SOLOMON WAS THE EPITOME OF **DISCERNMENT**.** Scripture declares that his wisdom **“SURPASSED THE WISDOM OF ALL THE SONS OF THE EAST AND ALL THE WISDOM OF EGYPT”** (1 KINGS 4:30).
- Moreover, ****GOD** GRANTED HIM UNSURPASSED **DISCERNMENT**: “BEHOLD I HAVE GIVEN YOU A WISE AND DISCERNING HEART, SO THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO ONE LIKE YOU BEFORE YOU, NOR SHALL ONE LIKE YOU ARISE AFTER YOU”** (1 KINGS 3:12).
- Yet those of us who know the rest of the story are usually quick to point out that it didn't finish well for Solomon, ***EVEN WITH HIS **ABUNDANCE OF WISDOM*****.