

A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

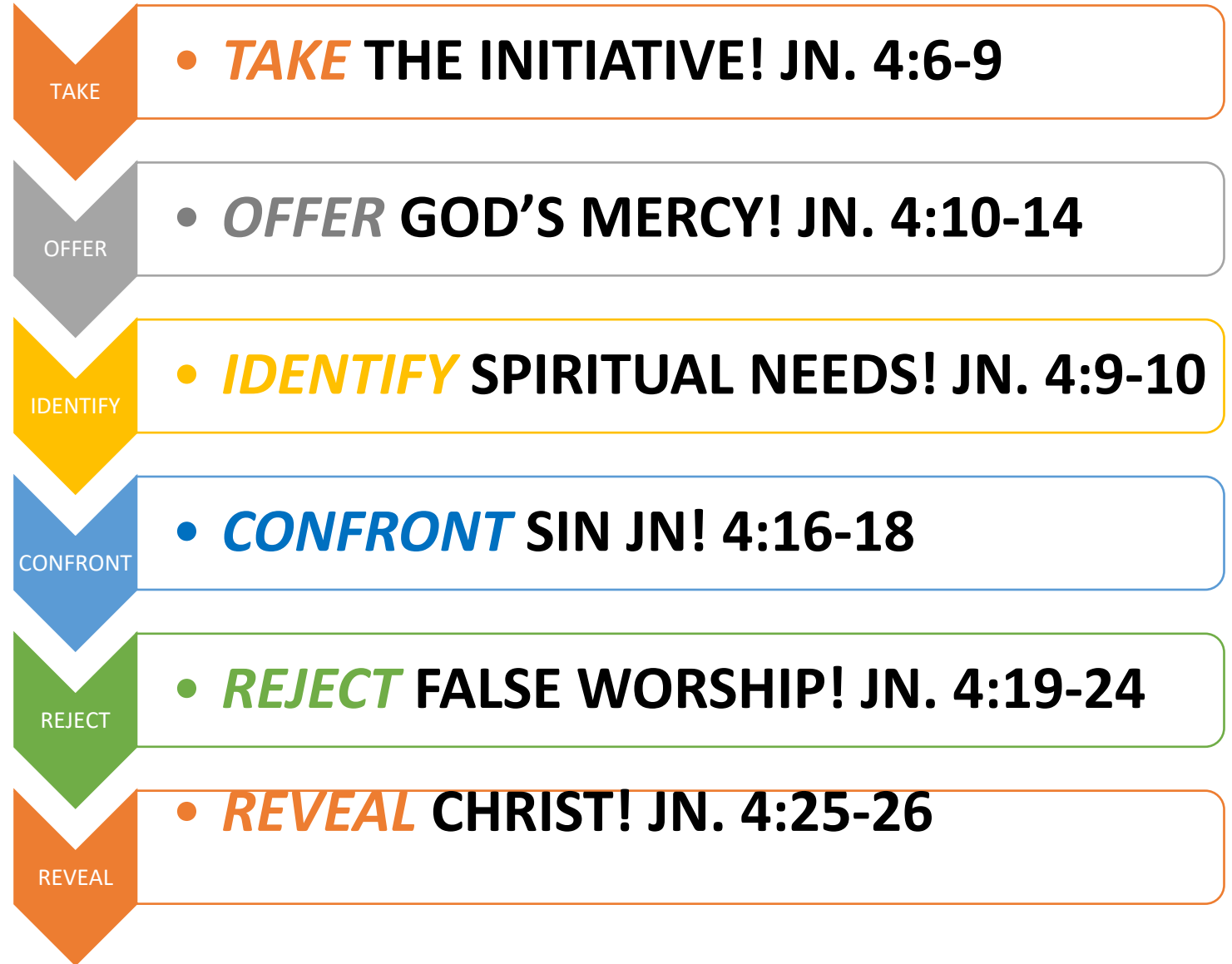


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's roots are massive and spread out, some resting on the ground and others draped over the stone walls of an old building. The stone is weathered and mossy. The background shows more greenery and trees, suggesting a jungle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



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.

- 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**.**

***SAD* ASSESSMENT OF THE *WISEST* MAN WHO EVER LIVED**

“NOW KING SOLOMON LOVED MANY FOREIGN WOMEN ALONG WITH THE DAUGHTER OF PHARAOH: MOABITE, AMMONITE, EDOMITE, SIDONIAN, AND HITTITE WOMEN, FROM THE NATIONS CONCERNING WHICH THE LORD HAD SAID TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, “YOU SHALL NOT ASSOCIATE WITH THEM, NOR SHALL THEY ASSOCIATE WITH YOU, FOR THEY WILL SURELY TURN YOUR HEART AWAY AFTER THEIR GODS.” SOLOMON HELD FAST TO THESE IN LOVE. HE HAD SEVEN HUNDRED WIVES, PRINCESSES, AND THREE HUNDRED CONCUBINES, AND HIS WIVES TURNED HIS HEART AWAY. FOR WHEN SOLOMON WAS OLD, HIS WIVES TURNED HIS HEART AWAY AFTER OTHER GODS; AND HIS HEART WAS NOT WHOLLY DEVOTED TO THE LORD HIS GOD, AS THE HEART OF DAVID HIS FATHER HAD BEEN. FOR SOLOMON WENT AFTER ASHTORETH THE GODDESS OF THE SIDONIANS AND AFTER MILCOM THE DETESTABLE IDOL OF THE AMMONITES...”

VERSE 6, SOLOMON DID WHAT WAS EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND DID NOT FOLLOW THE LORD FULLY, AS DAVID HIS FATHER HAD DONE. THEN SOLOMON BUILT A HIGH PLACE FOR CHEMOSH THE DETESTABLE IDOL OF MOAB, ON THE MOUNTAIN WHICH IS EAST OF JERUSALEM, AND FOR MOLECH THE DETESTABLE IDOL OF THE SONS OF AMMON. THUS, ALSO HE DID FOR ALL HIS FOREIGN WIVES, WHO BURNED INCENSE AND SACRIFICED TO THEIR GODS. NOW THE LORD WAS ANGRY WITH SOLOMON BECAUSE HIS HEART WAS TURNED AWAY FROM THE LORD. (1 KINGS 11:1-9)

- But **SOLOMON** did not suddenly fail at the end of his life. The seeds of his demise were sown at the very beginning. In **(1 KINGS 3)**, the same chapter that records young Solomon's request for **DISCERNMENT**, also reveals that he ***"FORMED A MARRIAGE ALLIANCE WITH PHARAOH KING OF EGYPT"*** **(1 KINGS 3:1)**. **VERSE 3** tells us, ***"SOLOMON LOVED THE LORD, WALKING IN THE STATUTES OF HIS FATHER DAVID, EXCEPT HE SACRIFICED AND BURNED INCENSE ON THE HIGH PLACES."***

- **FROM THE VERY BEGINNING HIS OBEDIENCE WAS DEFICIENT.** Surely with all his wisdom he knew better, but he tolerated **COMPROMISE** and **IDOLATRY** among the people of God (**1 KINGS 3:2**)—and even participated in some of the idolatry himself!
- **DISCERNMENT WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IS A RECIPE FOR APOSTASY.** What good is it to know the truth if we fail to act accordingly? That is why **JAMES** wrote, **“PROVE YOURSELVES DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DELUDE THEMSELVES”** (**JAMES 1:22**).
- **FAILURE TO OBEY IS SELF-DELUSION**; it is not true discernment, no matter how much intellectual knowledge we may possess. **SOLOMON** is biblical proof that even true discernment can give way to a destructive self-delusion. **DISOBEDIENCE INEVITABLY UNDERMINES DISCERNMENT.** THE ONLY WAY TO GUARD AGAINST THAT IS TO BE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT HEARERS ONLY.

FOLLOWING THE FAITHFUL.

- Nobody wants to be led off a cliff. But that's a very real possibility for anyone who follows the wrong leaders. **JESUS** said as much concerning the religious leaders of His time on earth: ***"THEY ARE BLIND GUIDES OF THE BLIND. AND IF A BLIND MAN GUIDES A BLIND MAN, BOTH WILL FALL INTO A PIT"*** (MATT. 15:14). FOLLOWING UNFIT LEADERS IS A SURE ROAD TO RUIN.
- ***NOWHERE IS THAT MORE APPARENT THAN IN THE CHURCH***. Scan the evangelical landscape for all the proof you need of the severe damage that unqualified and untrustworthy leaders can do to their congregations. ***BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT IS NONNEGOTIABLE***—it is an essential quality for church leaders and critical for those of us who sit under their teaching.

- **BELIEVERS** need to follow and emulate those who demonstrate **GODLY DISCERNMENT** and carefully avoid the leadership of people who are themselves ***“TOSSED HERE AND THERE BY WAVES AND CARRIED ABOUT BY EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE”*** (EPH. 4:14).
- **FIND AND FOLLOW** leaders who display an ability to **discern**, to **analyze** and **refute error**, to teach Scripture **clearly** and **accurately**.
- **READ** from authors who prove themselves careful handlers of divine truth.
- **LISTEN** to preachers who **RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD OF TRUTH**.
- **EXPOSE** yourself to the teaching of people who think **critically, analytically,** and **carefully**. Learn from people who understand where error has attacked the church historically.

PLACE YOURSELF UNDER THE TUTELAGE OF THOSE WHO SERVE AS WATCHMEN OF THE CHURCH.

- ***LISTEN, I DO THIS MYSELF.*** There are certain authors who have demonstrated skill in handling the Word and whose judgment I have come to trust. When I encounter a difficult issue—whether it is a ***theological problem***, an area of ***controversy***, a ***new teaching*** I have never heard before, or whatever else—I turn to these authors first to see what they have to say. I wouldn't seek help from an unreliable source or a marginal theologian. ***I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THOSE WHO ARE SKILLED IN EXPOSING ERROR AND ARE GIFTED IN PRESENTING TRUTH HAVE TO SAY.***
- There have been outstanding ***MEN OF DISCERNMENT*** in virtually every era of church history. Their writings remain invaluable resources for anyone who wishes to cultivate discernment. ***MARTYN LLOYD-JONES, J.I. PACKER, JOHN MacARTHUR, WARREN WIERSBE*** are four of many in the past century who distinguished themselves in the ***BATTLE FOR TRUTH.***

- **CHARLES SPURGEON, CHARLES HODGE**, and scores of other writers from the nineteenth century left a rich legacy of written material to help us **DISCERN TRUTH FROM ERROR**. In the century before that, **THOMAS BOSTON, JONATHAN EDWARDS**, and **GEORGE WHITEFIELD** battled for truth, as did many others.
- **THE PRECEDING ERA WAS THE PURITAN AGE**—the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which gave us what is undoubtedly the richest catalog of resources for **DISCERNMENT**. Before that, the **REFORMERS** fought valiantly for the truth of God’s Word against the traditions of men.
- Virtually every era before the Reformation also had **GODLY MEN OF DISCERNMENT** who stood against error and defended the truth of God’s Word. **AUGUSTINE**, for example, preceded **JOHN CALVIN** by more than a thousand years, but he fought exactly the same theological battles and proclaimed precisely the same doctrines.

- **CALVIN** and **THE REFORMERS** drew heavily on Augustine's writings as they framed their own arguments against error.
- In **A.D. 325** a contemporary of Augustine, **ATHANASIUS**, strongly stood against **ARIANISM**, the same error that is perpetuated by modern-day **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**. His writings stand today as the definitive response to that error.
- Much of the written legacy that these spiritual giants left is still available today. **WE CAN ALL LEARN FROM THESE MEN OF DISCERNMENT**—and we would do well to emulate the clarity with which they spoke the truth and denounced error.

THOSE WHO CAN EXPOSE AND ANSWER THE ERRORS OF FALSE TEACHERS ARE PLACED IN THE BODY OF CHRIST TO HELP US THINK CRITICALLY AND CLEARLY.

“LEARN FROM THEM.”

SPIRIT-POWERED DISCERNMENT.

- TRUE DISCERNMENT IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT DIVINE POWER. We need the true Discerner—*THE HOLY SPIRIT*—to lead us into all truth (**JN. 16:13**).
- We cannot fully understand what God is saying to us in His Word without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. (**1 COR. 2:11**) says, ***“THE THOUGHTS OF GOD NO ONE KNOWS EXCEPT THE SPIRIT OF GOD.”***
- **PAUL** goes on to write,
“NOW WE HAVE RECEIVED, NOT THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD, BUT THE SPIRIT WHO IS FROM GOD, SO THAT WE MAY KNOW THE THINGS FREELY GIVEN TO US BY GOD, WHICH THINGS WE ALSO SPEAK, NOT IN WORDS TAUGHT BY HUMAN WISDOM, BUT IN THOSE TAUGHT BY THE SPIRIT, COMBINING SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS WITH SPIRITUAL WORDS...”

VERSE 14, BUT A NATURAL MAN DOES NOT ACCEPT THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, FOR THEY ARE FOOLISHNESS TO HIM; AND HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY APPRAISED. BUT HE WHO IS SPIRITUAL APPRAISES (JUDGES) ALL THINGS, YET HE HIMSELF IS APPRAISED BY NO ONE.
(1 COR. 2:12-15).

- **DISCERNMENT ULTIMATELY DEPENDS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT.** As we are filled with and controlled by the Spirit of God, **HE MAKES US DISCERNING**. He leads us into all truth by granting us hunger for God's Word and the ability to discern its true meaning—something the **"NATURAL MAN"** is incapable of doing (**1 COR. 2:14**).
- **THE ILLUMINATION OF SCRIPTURE THROUGH THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL NECESSITY OF ALL DISCERNMENT.**

- **AND *TRUE DISCERNMENT* REQUIRES DILIGENT STUDY OF GOD'S WORD**. Every other tool of discernment is contingent on this reality. No one can be truly discerning apart from mastery of the Word of God. All the desire in the world cannot make you discerning if you don't study Scripture.
- ***PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT* IS *NOT* ENOUGH. *Obedience* alone will not suffice. *Good role models* won't do it either.**

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BE *DISCERNING*, YOU MUST DILIGENTLY STUDY THE *WORD OF GOD*.

GOD'S WORD IS WHERE YOU WILL LEARN THE PRINCIPLES FOR *DISCERNMENT*. IT IS THERE YOU WILL LEARN THE TRUTH. ONLY THERE CAN YOU FOLLOW THE *PATH OF MATURITY*.