

**Exhortations to Godliness**  
**“LIVE CAREFULLY”**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:21**

**Theme:** Discernment comes from realizing the absolutism of Truth.

**Introduction** Spiritual discernment is the ability to distinguish truth from error and half-truth. Intellectualism - which elevates human reason and rationalism above revelation along with relativism - which denies the legitimacy of a “truth for all”; humanism - which elevates the ego-centric recalibration of truth; and post-modernism that enables subjectivism to prevail with a suspicion of reason. We are constantly being assaulted by speculations and “lofty things” that are raised up against the knowledge of Christ - 2 Corinthians 10:5 - **“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** Also, as we drift away from God, we are overtaken by God giving us over until one becomes **“futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened”** - Romans 1:21.

It is in light of these things that Paul informs those who would be godly that they must “live carefully” ...

**I. THE DROUGHT OF DISCERNMENT - “But ...”**

**A. The Neglect of Truth**

1. In the previous verses, Paul had admonished believers to realize their dependency upon two major contributors to their discernment
  - a) The Holy Spirit - v. 19
  - b) The Word of God - v. 20
2. As people distance themselves, or are distanced, from the Word of God, their grasp of truth becomes diminished and they become commensurately susceptible to error.
3. The primary source of truth must be the authoritative propositions that are objectively known through the pages of Scripture.
4. Additionally, when God’s Word is neglected, people tend to “lean on their own understanding.” - cp. **Proverbs 3:5** - **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.”**
5. As they prefer their own perspectives, or the perspectives foisted upon them by “conventional wisdom” or popular opinion, they quench the Holy Spirit - **1 Corinthians 1:21** - **“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness**

**of the message preached to save those who believe.”**

6. The way men think fall tragically short of the way God thinks - the consequences of which are devastating - **Proverbs 16:25** - **“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death;”** and, **Isaiah 55:8-9** - **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”**
7. Such is what it means to “despise **prophetic utterances**” and thereby “quench the Spirit.”
8. It is in this way, that discernment is lost - people buy into the notions that you can follow Christ and yet abort babies, be immoral, a drunkard, do cocaine and live a lazy life, dependent upon others to provide for you.

## B. The Relativity of Truth

1. When this process settles into the mind of a person, their perspective becomes malleable and conformable to “reason,” “feeling,” or “intuition.”
2. Whatever seems right is what is right for such people who do not see any authority outside their own perspectives - cp. **Judges 21:25** - **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**
3. Yet, our depravity keeps us from being capable of thinking in a godly, proper, realistic way - we are deluded by our own arrogance - **Proverbs 12:15** - **“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”**
4. The ideas of “going with your gut,” or “let your conscience be your guide,” or “follow your own truth” are not truth loving perspectives, but deniers of truth.
5. The dismissal of the absolutes of Scripture untethers a mind from reality and creates a perspective that meanders into error upon error - cp. **Romans 1:21** - **“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”**
  - a) “futile” [**ματαιόω**] - worthless or empty
  - b) “darkened” [**σκοτιζω**] - an obstruction to perception; the blinding of an ability to see - cp. **Ephesians 4:17-18** - **“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness**

*of their heart;”*

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCERNMENT - “... *examine everything carefully*”

### A. The Standard for Truth

1. Paul admonishes us to instead, distrust our own perspectives and even the perspectives provided by others.
2. He instructions us to “*examine everything carefully.*”
3. “*examine*” [δοκιμάζω] **present active imperative** - means “**to make a critical examination of something; to determine genuineness, put to the test, examine**<sup>1</sup>
4. Obviously, such an “examination” requires a “control standard” something against which you compare something to determine its authenticity.
5. The standard of truth - the “touchstone” of truth is the Word of God - **Acts 17:11** - “**Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining<sup>2</sup> the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.**”
6. The issue is that we must never allow ourselves to be duped into thinking errantly even by those we think can be trusted to tell us the truth - **1 John 4:1** - “**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test [examine] the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**”
7. It is in this way that we always set the Word of God above all else - opinions, logic, arguments, cases built, or syllogistic derivations - **Jude 3** - “**Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**”
8. Notice that we are to “*examine everything*” [πάντα] - literally “*everything*” is placed first in the word order of this command - and refers to the totality of that on which you focus; every idea or issue that you consider.
9. The Word of God literally addresses everything that pertains to life and godliness and it must prevail over any and all rival authorities that one might choose - cp. **2 Peter 1:3** - “**seeing that His divine power has granted to us**

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<sup>1</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 255.

<sup>2</sup> This word for examine is different: ἀνακρίνω which means to engage in careful study of a question.

*everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”*

## **B. The Submission to Truth**

1. The Word of God then must be that to which we bow our will – not the other way around – **James 1:22** – *“But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”*
2. By means of submitting ourselves to the Word of God, we gain the discernment necessary to be stable of soul and prosperous of heart – **Joshua 1:8** – *“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”*
3. Those who loose themselves from the authority of God’s Word return to a state of vulnerability – **Ephesians 4:14-15** – *“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.”*
4. Ultimately, our willingness to submit to the Word of God is the hallmark of those who are redeemed – **Romans 2:8** – *“... but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”*

## **III. THE DISCIPLINE OF DISCERNMENT – “... hold fast to that which is good ...”**

### **A. The Ardor for Truth**

1. Our responsibility when we have heard the truth of God’s Word and gained the insight necessary to be discerning – we are to *“hold [it] fast.”*
2. *“hold fast”* [κατέχω] – refers to taking something into possession and make one’s own – a reference to the tenacious possession of truth – to “lay a claim” on it so that it is your own.
3. It means that you don’t give lip service to the truth, but that you appropriate it and make it your own – it is what you think.

### **B. The Absolutism of Truth**

1. That which we make our own is *“that which is good”* [τὸ καλὸν] – referring to every Word that is contained in the Word of God.
2. It refers to what is noble, right, genuine, moral, and true.

3. The entirety of Scripture is in mind and everything that it addresses - **2 Timothy 3:16-17** - ***“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.”***