

Mark Baker



LOVE & DISCERNMENT

Why We Need Both

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Love & Discernment:
Why We Need Both

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**I have no greater joy
than to hear that my children
walk in truth.**

(3 John 1:4)

INTRODUCTION

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

(1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

(1 John 4:1)

Tens of thousands of people recently flocked to the tiny town of Wilmore, Kentucky, which has a population of just 6,000 (and also happens to be the birthplace of my lovely grandmother, Ruth). Why did these crowds come? Because they were told an amazing revival was happening, and they wanted to see and experience it for themselves. Interestingly, the school where this occurred, Asbury University, effectively ended these meetings after a few weeks, at least for outsiders/non-students. Someone rented out a venue about thirty minutes away, perhaps as a way to keep it going, but it was sparsely attended.

Even though there were fifty thousand or so attendees at the original gatherings, this event generated millions, if not billions of opinions. While many immediately deemed it a sure move of God and celebrated what was happening at Asbury, others had their doubts. Overall, many questions have been raised, concerns expressed, and challenges made about this purported revival. And, as we might expect, there has been a lot of arguing and infighting as to whether this was an actual move of God, or not.

While it is important to assess the immediate question at hand — “Was this a true revival, or not?” — we are going to take a different approach here. Instead, we will examine *how people responded* (and are still responding) to all of this. In so doing, we will take advantage of the wonderful opportunities to learn from not only this particular instance but anything else that comes along—and to be better equipped to love and lead others—especially with truth, through discernment, and God’s Word of truth.

CHAPTER 1

LOVE, TRUTH & DISCERNMENT

[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth ... (1 Corinthians 13:6)

... and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:10)

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

Let's start with one of the most valuable and life-changing principles possible. **Love, truth, and discernment are inseparable.** Therefore, we cannot really love well without good, biblical discernment. In addition, without truth and discernment, we will be in error and will, almost assuredly, harm others and ourselves. This means that what a person *functionally* believes about the above principles regarding love and discernment will have a profound influence on how well they love, and on their life overall.

With this established, and with a deep desire to grow in how we love—and in knowing and living in God's love—our prayer and goal throughout this document is the same as the apostle Paul's when he wrote these words.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

We should all pray that the love of others will grow more. And while such a prayer is good, Paul has something infinitely better in mind here. Instead, and more specifically, he prays that their love will abound more and more in both *“knowledge and all discernment”* (another translation says, *“in knowledge and depth of insight.”*)

In other words, his heart for them is not merely to have more love, but a love that steadily increases in a deep and accurate knowledge of life and love—and a keen insight and ability to discern truth from error—so that they may have a highly enhanced love. This kind of love naturally aids them in avoiding harmful error, while confidently blessing others with a truth-based love, all according to God’s divine design. This is our hope and prayer as well.

Along these lines, it is virtually impossible to overstate the importance of the word *“approve”* in verse ten above, particularly as it relates to love, wisdom, and all of life. To try would be like trying to exaggerate the importance of air to our lungs or the necessity of our minds to thinking.

“Approve” here is the Greek word *dokimazō*, and it is defined as: “to test, examine, prove, scrutinise (to see *whether a thing is genuine or not*).” This is the same word translated as “test” in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and 1 John 4:1. And, whether we realize it or not, so much of our life and the way we love depends on how well we understand and apply the functional realities contained in this one word.

The loving and critical aspect of *approving* helps explain why we see our loving Father frequently exhorting us to discern—and to *test everything*—so that we can “prove” (not assume, not decide rashly) what is right, best, true, and loving. This, in turn, naturally helps us to avoid harm from erroneous ideas and practices (e.g., “without offense”). We can also easily see how testing-and-approving is absolutely essential for truly knowing God and His love—and for loving Him and tangibly loving others.

This love/test/prove connection is wonderfully illustrated in how we see parents love and protect their children in a multitude of ways. Parents *test* food to see if it is spoiled, sour, or hot before their children eat it. They *examine* toys, bikes, tools, and a myriad of other things for safety. They *scrutinize* baby-sitters, teachers, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, schools, cars, etc., in order to *prove* if someone, or something, is safe, good, and *genuine or not*. This is common sense and essential for life. However, for a variety of reasons, this sort of love has dwindled in the Church.

While test-to-protect love is invaluable, it is only the first part of discerning love. The second aspect is how parents

love and equip their children to think and discern for themselves. We can easily see how a parents' discernment and protection is vital to well-being in our youth, but we also need to understand how important it is that we increasingly develop our *own* discernment as we mature and grow into adulthood (cp. Heb 5:12-14; Prov 2:11ff). Our lives literally depend on it (cp. Prov 7:7, 21-23; 14:15; 22:3).

Therefore, just like our loving Father, our parents would exhort and equip us to biblically examine and test all things to make sure they are genuine, or not. Otherwise our growth will be stunted, and we will be highly susceptible to the perils that surround us. Or, in contrast, we can become mature and prepared to thrive in life, with our senses skillfully trained to detect evil and good.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)

As we know, yet often forget, this world is full of dangers, deception, scams, snares, scheming people, evil, counterfeits, wolves in sheep's clothing, and is ruled by the Deceiver who wants to deceive, rob, kill, and destroy all of us. And at some point nearly all of us will be on our own,

and not able to depend on mom, dad, or others.

Therefore, a top trait of loving parents is to sufficiently equip their children to be able to objectively *think for themselves*, based on objective standards, so that they can accurately separate fact from fiction, biblical from unbiblical, safe from harmful, and truth from counterfeits (e.g., counterfeit love, justice, Jesus, etc.), and live accordingly. In fact, the book of Proverbs is largely all about this—and much of that book of wisdom is written as a father to his child. Here is just a sampling:

My son, let them not depart from your eyes—

Keep sound wisdom and discretion;

So they will be life to your soul

And grace to your neck.

Then you will walk safely in your way,

And your foot will not stumble.

(Proverbs 3:21-23)

With all this in mind—and in relation to the activities in Asbury—a more specific concern arose regarding the responses of those who were quickly jumping to an absolute conclusion, and then would not allow this event, nor their speedy assessment, to be questioned or examined. To make matters worse, some either openly or subtly shamed others and discouraged them from discerning the ongoings in Wilmore.

In other words, what was commonly observed was essentially an immediate and unapproachable summary judgment of: “Trust me. This is clearly of God. Do not doubt me, and do not question this at all. Yeah, there will always be critics. But those who question this are ____.” (e.g., judgmental, cynics, Pharisees).

Note: These common responses include what we call *False Summary Judgments*, which often go hand-in-hand with *echo chambers* and *groupthink* (more on this later). While there are times to make judgments (Jn 7:24), even pointed ones (2 Tim 4:1-2), *False Summary Judgments* are never used to make a reasoned argument. Rather, they are often relied upon to escape a reasoned discussion—and to avoid explaining or defending one’s beliefs (e.g., “Oh yeah? Well, you’re ... you’re dumb ...and ... and a racist ...”).

Making things worse, *False Summary Judgments* are actually *false accusations* which harm others—as *sin* always does. Even worse, they dull the discernment and thinking ability of the false accuser. Similarly, some might deem a *False Summary Judgment* to be a *Thought-Terminating Cliché*, which is also considered a *logical fallacy*. Whatever you call it, when we hear or see such things, they do not come from a good place, and they never lead to anything good.

Is this how God teaches us to approach a proposed move of the Spirit, a popular book, or a new (or old) practice in the Church? Is that a wise way to lead in matters like this? At least *this* answer is easy: NO. Instead, we, like our loving

heavenly Father, should be highly encouraging everyone to test *all* things—especially the latest thing—according to Scripture.

These poor responses remind me of a conversation I had with a young man years ago. He had just started to date a young lady, and they were trying to figure out how well they were matched. They attended different churches and, as he soon found out, she liked some teachers and authors who, in his mind, had very questionable theology. So he asked her to sit with him and go through Scripture and examine her favorite author's teachings. Her abrupt and scoffing response perfectly illustrates the response of many regarding Asbury, and other key issues in the Church: "Ha! I don't need the Bible to determine that he is a man of God!"

But is that not the whole point ... to use God's Word to thoroughly examine someone or something to decide if they are biblical and of God, or not? (cp. Matt 4:1-11) Is that not what we are all called to do? If, instead, we do not fully test something, by a careful search of the Scriptures, then what is the likelihood we will be deceived, *as well* as mislead and harm others? How loving is that?

Thankfully, God gave us the Bereans as a prime example of this. When Paul the Apostle came—who was the leader of the Church at the time, the preeminent evangelist, and would be the most prolific writer of the New Testament—they did not merely take his word for it. No, instead, they faithfully fulfilled their due diligence, both in discerning, and with God's written Word.

These [the Bereans] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and *searched the Scriptures daily* to find out whether these things were so.
(Acts 17:11)

Note: The word “searched” here is the Greek word *anakrinō* defined as: examine or judge; to investigate, examine, enquire into, scrutinize, sift, question.

Every leader in the church should be highly exhorting everyone to do this very thing every day.

So, while this woman’s alarming response told this man all he needed to know, the rash decisions and dismissive responses we see today also largely tell us what we need to know. Not only do many fail the Berean test, they fail to follow Jesus’ instructions as well.

Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. (John 7:24)

More specifically, these disappointing actions should alarm us, grieve us, and motivate us even more to think biblically in order love others with the truth, and help them avoid deception and destruction.

Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

(1 Timothy 4:15-16)

CHAPTER 2

PUT TO THE TEST

Test *all things*; hold fast what is good.

(1 Thessalonians 5:21)

So, with all of the above in mind, let's learn by using a practice test, of sorts. Imagine someone comes to you and says: "Hey, my cousin started going to church, isn't that great?" How would you answer?

One common response is: "Yes, absolutely. Praise God!"

Another less common way of responding would be:

"I certainly hope so, but how can we be sure at this point? Going to a church is, potentially, a great first step. However, I want to make sure he finds a good church, and is not harmed in any way. Therefore, as God frequently commands us to do, *we need to put this to the test* (e.g., 1 Jn 4:1-6; 1 Thess 5:21-22; Matt 7:13-20; Acts 17:11). Why? Because God is trying to keep us from some blessing? (cp. Gen 3:4-5) Because He is so legalistic and demands perfection? No. It is because He loves us so much, and He knows there are innumerable snares out there that can easily deceive and destroy us, and our loved ones. With that in mind, what kind of church, exactly, is he going to? Just as there are some

good churches, there are, sadly, many bad churches as well—and I don't want your cousin to be deceived or harmed in any way. And, on top of that, I want him to know the true Jesus, His love and salvation, and to be blessed in this life and for all eternity."

While there is certainly a spectrum between the two responses, which one best describes you? If 0 is the first way, and 10 is the second, what number would you give yourself?

While the second option makes perfect sense—but only if we look at it in the right way—why do you suppose so few people respond like this?

And then there is a third way of responding, particularly toward the second response: "Don't listen to him. He's a judgmental Pharisee. He has a critical spirit. He's a divisive person (cp. 1 Kgs 18:17-18). Can't he just be happy that your loved one is interested in spiritual things? God is love. Don't put God in a box. He will work it all out. If your cousin is going to church, then obviously this is a move of God in his life."

How well does the response above fit with God's exhortation to test all things and discern truth from error, so that we can truly love and bless others (e.g., Phil 1:9-11; 1 Thess 5:21-22; 1 Jn 4:1-6)? If you tend to respond that way, please prayerfully and biblically examine your heart and your judgment.

Note: I recently read that a woman tried to cast a “critical spirit” out of a man, on social media, because he was trying to sift through and ask hard questions about the activities at Asbury.

As you hopefully know, a person going to church does not necessarily mean it’s a good thing. While it certainly brings about possibilities for something great, and can be a wonderful first step, much is involved here. In fact, this is rarely a simple subject with an easy answer.

What is more, choosing a church is very serious and, in many ways, if the wrong choice is made, can lead to deep deception and soul crushing pain. It can truly be a matter of life or death, literally, figuratively, and spiritually. (Acts 20:28-30; Jas 5:19-20) How so?

While there are good churches, we know there are also countless churches that are counterfeits, error-filled, and often led by people who are incompetent, abusive, corrupt, and even “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (see Matt 7:13-20; Acts 20:28-30). With these truths in mind, which of the following churches would you be comfortable with your loved one attending?

- **LEGALISTIC** | A legalistic, grace-lacking church (heavy on rules, guilt, and performance—and light on grace, forgiveness, love, freedom, etc.)
- **CONTROLLING** | A controlling church (similar to a legalistic church)

- **APOSTATE** | An apostate church (2 Pet 2:1ff; Matt 7:21-23)
- **TRENDY** | A trend-following church (one that tends to go with the latest spirit of the age, and the latest techniques; cp. Eph 4:14; 1 Cor 2:6ff; 3:18-20)
- **SINFUL** | A church which, in one way or another, enables and approves of sin (Jer 23:14; Jude 1:3ff; There is nothing God takes more seriously than sin—and providing the solutions to sin. Every church should do the same.)
- **LUKEWARM** | A lukewarm church (see Rev 3:14-22)
- **DEAD** | A dead church (see Rev 3:1-6)
- **UNLOVING** | A church that lacks love (e.g., Rev 2:1-7; 1 Cor 13:1-3)
- **COMPROMISING** | A compromising church (e.g., Rev 2:12-17; Ps 1:1; Col 2:8)
- **CORRUPT** | A corrupt church (e.g., Rev 2:18-29)
- **PREDATORY** | A church with predators (spiritually; and/or aimed at children or women ... and men as well)
- **WEAK** | A weak church (one that does not stand boldly on God's Word of truth, and does not really stand on anything of importance; nor do they make a stand against the many anti-Christian, anti-humanity beliefs and activity going on in the world)

- **WORLD-APPROVED** | A *world-approved* church (one that seeks to largely mimic the world, seeks their acceptance, fears their disapproval, and fears offending them; cp. Jas 4:4; Rom 12:2; 1 Jn 4:1-6)
- **FALSE PROPHETS** | A church that has leaders who have made one or more prophecies which have turned out to be false (e.g., Matt 24:11)
- **PROSPERITY GOSPEL** | A “Word of Faith,” “name-it-and-claim-it” type church
- **OVERLY WEALTHY PASTORS** | A church where the pastor insists he/she needs a private plane (or two, or three), and lots of money (similar to the one above)
- **NO GOSPEL** | A church without the gospel
- **FALSE GOSPEL** | A church with a false gospel (Gal 1:6-9)
- **ENEMIES OF THE CROSS** | A church with “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18-19)
- **FALSE JESUS** | A church with a “different Jesus”/false Jesus (2 Cor 11:3-4)
- **ADVERSARIAL** | A church that is adversarial toward true Christians (Jn 16:1-3; Gal 1:13)
- **NEW AGE** | A church that is in line with the New Age (and many other forms of *mysticism*)

- **HERETICAL** | A church that teaches that we can be like God, or can be a God (e.g., Gen 3:4)
- **WORLDLY WISDOM** | A church that teaches humanism/pop-psychology (e.g., the world's wisdom)
- **CULTISH** | A church that is cultish
- **CULT** | A "church" that is a cult
- **MONEY FOCUSED** | A church that is focused on money, and frequently asked for money, and guilts and shames people into giving money
- **PRAGMATIC OVER BIBLICAL** | A "Mega-Church" (one that is highly focused on large numbers; cp. Matt 7:13-14; that focuses and relies on *pragmatism* over *faithfully teaching the Word of God*; in other words: what "works" over what is biblical; cp. Prov 14:12)
- **UNACCOUNTABLE** | A church that rarely, if ever, holds people accountable (especially its leaders)
- **ABUSIVE** | An abusive church: one that is abusing people, or, wittingly or not, has allowed or is allowing abuse by those within
- **CONTROLLING LEADERSHIP** | A church led by a controlling leader, who surrounds himself with "yes men" when it comes to elders, staff, and other leadership

- **DYSFUNCTIONAL** | A dysfunctional church (which will assuredly, at a minimum, enable abuse and other destructive behaviors)

In addition to the previous list, here are a few more extreme examples of churches that most of us would not recommend.

- **SNAKE HANDLERS** | A snake-handling church—which is a very real thing (and, as I have been told, is a part of my family’s background in Kentucky as well)
- **MARS HILL TYPE #1** | Mars Hill Church (the one with Mark Driscoll, which was shut down, largely due to numerous complaints of abuse, and the elders enabling and perhaps covering this up ... and any similar church)
- **MARS HILL TYPE #2** | Mars Hill Church (the one formerly led by Rob Bell, who has a New Age-y Jesus, theology, etc., ... and any similar church; Bell heavily influenced thousands of other churches in his heyday)
- **JIM JONES TYPE** | A church like The People’s Temple (led by Jim Jones, one of the most infamous “churches” in history, which ended horrifically in the mass suicide of almost all of its members)
- **BRANCH DAVIDIAN TYPE** | A church like The Branch Davidian’s (led by David Koresh, who claimed to be “the final prophet,” and which also came to a tragic end)

This is a small sample, largely with broad brush strokes (though we could go into even more specifics). There are many more harmful churches out there. The point here is that we can see that it *is not always a good thing to go to church*. In fact, going to certain churches—or involvement in other movements, ministries, books, etc.—could be the single worst decision of one’s life. (cp. Matt 7:21-23; Rev 20:11-15)

I know many people personally, and have counseled *hundreds and hundreds* of others, who have suffered immensely, and are often still suffering, because they were either ensnared by some deadly false teaching that sounded great or came under the influence of harmful leadership. So much is on the line when we enter a church, or buy into a new book, teaching, or movement. Sometimes it is wonderful, and other times it is lethal.

However, if someone immediately responds with, “He’s going to church? Yay, that’s great!” then, while they may be well-intentioned, they have almost certainly not thought it through. Or, much worse, they are woefully equipped when it comes to discernment, and how love, truth, and active discernment go hand-in-hand. On top of this, there are many who simply lack the love and concern to thoroughly examine a potential danger for others (i.e., laziness).

Nevertheless, these poor responses parallel how many people responded to the activities in Asbury. “Yes, this is certainly a good thing and a move of God. And it is so wonderful, no one should question it.”

So, with that in mind, here is a quick test: what will happen in the following three scenarios?

1. **Good** Intentions + **Bad** Theology/Ideology = _____

2. **Good** Intentions + **Good** Theology/Ideology = _____

3. **Bad** Intentions + **Good** Theology/Ideology = _____

Truth is essential for everything good. How much more necessary is the truth when it comes to love, Jesus, the gospel, heaven, and hell?

On the other hand, if we get these wrong (e.g., with error, confusion, distortion), then we will not only be deceived, we will be harmed in untold ways, all depending on how much error and falsehood we believe (e.g., Matt 7:13-23; Gal 6:7-8; Rev 20:11-15). Yes, intentions are important. But there are billions of reasons that support the saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

If our heart is in the right place, if we want to love others, one of the most loving things we can do is to make sure we know and live in the truth—and help others to do the same—out of love based solely on the truth (e.g., 1 Cor 13:1-8; Mk 12:30-31; Jn 14:6; 17:17; 1 Jn 3:18; 2 Jn 1:4-6; 3 Jn 1:3-4).

When it comes to a critical area of life, love, and God, would you rather a person care about you, but mislead you with a big lie, or not really care about you, but give you the full truth?

How would you explain, in a couple of sentences, how important it is to avoid erroneous theology/ideology, and to know and live according to the truth?

CHAPTER 3

SAVING SOULS BY DETECTING DEADLY COUNTERFEITS

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

(2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

God repeatedly warns us about *counterfeit signs, miracles, and wonders*. More specifically, He also shows us how these are associated with false conversions (Matt 7:21-23; 13:24-30, 39-39), with our enemies, and with how Lucifer deceives large numbers of people, which heavily influences, if not largely determines, their eternal destination in hell (2 Thess 2:8-12).

What, then, could be more important and more loving than to be able to detect and warn others about these deadly ploys of the enemy?

For more, see our article on the subject:

Counterfeits, The Enemy's Greatest Weapon

What is more, these counterfeits are largely *inside of the Church*. And they especially come from those who claim to be speaking for God, and who give a convincing appearance of being for Jesus (Matt 24:11, 23-25; cp. 1 Kgs 22:9ff). If God is so eager to sound the alarm about these lethal imitations—and for very good reason—then we, too, should fervently do the same (Ezek 33:1ff; Jude 1:3).

Note: One thing we will *not* see in a counterfeit movement—especially when it comes to revivals and trends in the Church (including popular books)—are leaders who consistently, accurately, and openly warn about counterfeits. Nor will we see people take the time to biblically support and explain their conclusions, and actively follow up to keep everyone accountable regarding any pseudo-biblical notions. In fact, while all of this is a minimum requirement in things that are biblical and of God, the *absence* of these is often a sign of a counterfeit (cp. 2 Cor 2:11; 11:3-4), or it will open the door for them to come in.

The Chief Counterfeiter lives to deceive and destroy people. Therefore, in order to achieve his diabolical goals, he has produced countless counterfeits. While we know these fabrications will give *the appearance* of being just like the real thing, we also know they are, by definition, misleading, false, and harmful. These deceptive ploys include counterfeit miracles, movements, gospels, awakenings, revivals—as well as popular books, people, churches—and whatever the latest trend is in the Church (e.g., the Enneagram; mystical practices; cp. Ex 7:10-11; Gen 3:6; 2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-15; Matt 7:13-23).

We also know that—because of the alluring-yet-phony “good” that comes with counterfeits—many people will be deceived and *greatly harmed*. In fact, the more good and truth is mixed in, the more enticing and believable the lie is, and, therefore, the more dangerous that counterfeit will be. That is one reason why Spurgeon explained discernment this way:

Discernment is not a matter of simply knowing the difference between right and wrong, rather it is knowing the difference between right and **almost** right.

—C.H. Spurgeon (emphasis added)

On the other hand, if we look at this the right way, these counterfeits are actually great opportunities to love and bless others. How? Because, as we know, evil imitations abound; therefore, few things, if any, are more important—*and more loving*—than detecting, avoiding, and warning others about these seductive deathtraps.

Even better, and more tangibly loving, is to actively turn people away from the death and destruction involved in error, sin, deception (Prov 24:11-12; Eph 5:6-11; Ti 1:9ff). In so doing, we can literally “*save a soul from death*.”

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will **save a soul from death** and cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

In contrast to these counterfeits, we also know that there are genuine moves of God, as well as individuals, books, and churches that are truly biblical, which strengthen, equip, and bless many people. Sadly, however, given our sinful nature, and the nature of the world we live in, there are far fewer of these than we might think (cp. Matt 7:13-14).

Nevertheless, it is up to us—to all of us individually—to diligently discern one from the other (Phil 1:9-11; Acts 17:11; Is 8:19-20; Heb 5:14). This is no small task. These things should never be taken lightly, nor decided quickly, or without a thorough investigation with God’s Word. Why? Because our life and well-being—and that of many others—depends on our discernment, and how well we accurately distinguish between evil imitations and what is actually good and of God.

How much *more* responsibility pastors and leaders have in this critical area of life and death (cp. 1 Kgs 3:9-11; Ezek 33:1ff; Acts 20:28-30; Eph 4:11-32; Heb 5:12-14; Jas 3:1). In fact, every pastor, leader, and godly person should be *openly* encouraging everyone to **diligently discern all things**, especially when it comes to the big and popular

goings-on in the Church, and in the world. There should be no question at all that they are exhorting every believer to biblically “test” and “approve” all things (Phil 1:9-11), to practice using Scripture to support our beliefs, and to expose faulty teachings.

Note: See how Jesus frequently did this very thing (Matt 4:1-11; 21:42; 22:29; Lk 24:27ff).

Sadly, those who practice this are few and far between. Instead, it seems many, if not most, leaders focus on telling people *what* to think, rather than teaching them *how* to think. Ideally, leaders would also frequently teach how to think *biblically*, and, therefore, how to live and love *according to God’s Word*.

How different the world would be—and how much more of an impact the Church would have on the world, rather than the other way around—if more pastors did the latter, instead of the former. One cannot help but think that there would certainly be an actual biblical revival—with millions of changed hearts—if Church leaders did this one thing in the right way.

CHAPTER 4

IT'S NOT ALWAYS ALL-OR-NOTHING

Test all things; hold fast what is good.
Abstain from every form of evil.

(1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Kee in mind that—when it comes to distinguishing between truth and error, good and bad—some books, movements, teachers, and churches are *not* a matter of all-or-nothing. In other words, they do not always fit entirely into either *biblical* or *unbiblical*.

So, rather than a matter of either/or, some things should be measured on a spectrum—for example: between pure evil (0) and perfectly biblical (10). In addition, some things might qualify as a mixed-bag (i.e., where some things that are clearly good and godly can be isolated from the bad things). And then there are times when both apply. A few examples of this would be: David; Solomon; the “Jesus Movement;” Samson; Abraham; Peter; The Reformation; the Biblical Counseling movement; America’s founding fathers. There are many situations where deeper and more involved testing, approving, and distinguishing is needed.

Speaking of nuanced discernment, there are dangers to beware of when it is not a simple matter of true or false, either/or. One common way people err here is when they mis-apply the mixed-bag example to rationalize their compromises with counterfeits and false teachers with statements like: “Yeah, well, no one is perfect. And they have a lot of good stuff. Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater” (cp. 2 Jn 1:7-11; 2 Cor 6:14ff).

Note: We can find *some* truth in the Satanic Bible, Marxism, the New Age, etc., but that never justifies overlapping with these diabolical ideologies.

Similarly, there are some who misuse the assertions of: “Well, I eat the meat and spit out the bones,” or, “I just eat the good stuff and leave the bad stuff.” That might be okay here or there, at least in theory, and only when it actually applies. However, this, too, is dangerous. In reality, it does not always work that way. Ask Adam and Eve how well it worked for them to eat of “the tree of the knowledge of *good and evil*.” In fact, there was a three-to-one ratio of good to bad (see Gen 3:6)—but that one downside was ... *death, and the death of all mankind*.

A lot of these truth/error mixtures are package deals, like the illustration of mixing in just a little animal dung into a batch of brownies, or dropping a little poison into someone’s drink. These represent the many situations where we cannot really separate truth from error, the meat from the bones, or the good stuff from the poison.

A deceiver, and *the* Deceiver, will gladly add a lot of good and helpful things into the mix—as much as it takes—as long as it will lead to our deception and destruction. Therefore, some famous last words we might hear before a person is deceived—and wanders from and shipwrecks his faith—is something like, “Yeah, but... there is a lot of good things in there. It has helped me, and others, so ... I’ll just ignore the bad stuff, that way it won’t affect me.”

Compromise, error, and false teachings are not stagnant. It is their nature to worsen, expand, and pervert any good thing they touch. We must always keep in mind how just a *tiny* bit of “leaven” (erroneous teaching) will spread through *the entire* batch of dough (Gal 5:9). The eminent Dr. Ironside shared some necessary insight here:

Error is like leaven of which we read, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Truth mixed with error is equivalent to all error, except that it is more innocent looking and, therefore, **more dangerous**. God hates such a mixture! Any error, or any truth-and-error mixture, calls for definite exposure and repudiation. To condone such is to be unfaithful to God and His Word and treacherous to imperiled souls for whom Christ died.

—Dr. Harry Ironside (emphasis added)

To illustrate how all-or-nothing thinking can be misleading, here is another response I recently heard regarding Asbury: “If just one person is saved, it’s worth it,” followed by, “So stop trying to poke holes in this—it’s all worth it.”

It certainly is worth it for that one hypothetical individual, and we should rejoice if this did happen. However, in this same scenario, what about all of the other people? What about God and the overall Church? And what if, in addition this one soul saved, there are a dozen people who are deceived, destroyed, and will never know Jesus? [Note: These evil outcomes are very common with counterfeits.]

And what if a hundred people are beguiled, severely damaged, and will never, ever know the Lord as a result of the activities involved here? What if it is a thousand? A million? What is the proper ratio of saved-to-destroyed people that will make something “worth it”? And what, exactly, will make this *not* worth it?

If someone writes a marriage book, and it helps to save five marriages, but it destroys a hundred marriages, is that something you would recommend to a struggling friend? What if it *seemingly* helps a lot of marriages, at least at first, but it contains many unbiblical teachings which result in destructive outcomes down the road? Would you encourage others to read such a book and apply its ideas (Prov 14:12)?

For more, see our post on a popular marriage book:

True Love Or Manipulation?

Let's apply this to a real life situation, albeit an extreme one. Was *The People's Temple* (a church led by Jim Jones) "worth it"? We know that 900+ people were murdered (i.e., they were beguiled and cajoled into killing themselves and their family members), while many others were profoundly deceived and harmed. But if one person was saved, was that worth it?

A few years ago I counseled a few people who survived Jim Jones (they did not go to Guyana), and who are now believers. Does their salvation status make the devastation at Jonestown worth it? If ten or even fifty people were saved, would you say, "It was all worth it," to the family members of those slaughtered in South America, and those who were left crushed and abused back in the States?

An all-or-nothing generalized declaration of, "X happened, therefore it's worth it, and no one should question it," is not only false, it also discourages people from thinking deeper and biblically discerning what is before them. This will also likely allow untold amounts of erroneous teachings and practices to mix in with any pure truth. As a result, many will be deceived and hurt.

In addition, the rationale of this faulty notion, "If one person is saved, then it is worth it," essentially fits with Jesus' rebuke of straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel (Matt 23:24). In the grand scheme of things, they are focusing on a tiny thing, but are completely ignoring the massive elephant (camel) in the room. This can only lead to deception and destruction.

One main functional aspect of discernment is *separating* (which also goes hand-in-hand with *sanctification*). Therefore, we should work hard at clearly separating error from truth—not carelessly mixing them, and not allowing them to flow together. Nor should we be comfortable with ambiguity (cp. 1 Thess 5:21-22). If there is anything that can be set apart and distinguished as something good and untainted from error, we should do so—while also separating what is wrong and harmful, while giving clear warnings to others about those things (e.g., Rev 2-3). Sadly, those who rely on notions like, “eat the meat and spit out the bones” rarely if ever do this.

The question of “Is it worth it?” may have a time and place—but if we want to determine if something is true, biblical, and of God, the main questions should be: “Is this *biblical*?” as well as, “*How* biblical is this?”

The degree to which something is biblical is the degree to which it is good and of God. If it is unbiblical, then it will be harmful. The written Word is our objective, divine **standard** by which we can and should judge these things (e.g., Is 8:19-20; Acts 17:11; Matt 4:1-11; Rom 15:4).

Biblical = clearly supported by and not going against God’s written Word

Unbiblical = clearly lacking Scriptural support, and conflicting with the Word

In addition, stating that a person has been saved is very *subjective*. There is no way to know for sure if another person has been truly reconciled with God. We also know there are innumerable false conversions (Matt 7:15-23). Having worked in ministries and churches for decades, I have witnessed countless people “get saved” (raise their hand; go forward; etc.), or be reported by others to have been saved; but, over time, they never show any fruit of being saved. So, to establish this as the criterion leads to a lot of problems. Remember, the Deceiver can and will produce counterfeit miracles, as well as place multitudes in the Church, including leadership (Matt 7:13-27; 13:24-30).

Perhaps nothing is sweeter or glorifies God more than when a person crosses from death to life. As great as that is, we do not control whether or not people are saved. We do, however, fully control how we think and what we believe. We also have control over how well we discern, how well we love others and present the gospel, how well we protect others from error and harm, and how well we know, teach, and live out God’s Word. Therefore, we should focus on these things, and entrust the outcome to God.

To further illustrate how we can break out of the all-or-nothing paradigm (for when such an either/or choice should *not* apply), there can and should be several other discerning and objective questions that we both ask and answer from the following list.

DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

1. How can we support this, or not, with **specific** verses (and without twisting Scripture)?
2. Which **verses** conflict with this?
3. What **erroneous** teachings are involved, if any?
4. What kind of harmful and **unbiblical** practices are practiced and taught?
5. What are the **biblical** principles and practices taught?
6. What is the lasting **fruit**, both good and bad?
7. What **errors** and problems should we warn others of?

In a revealing (and actually helpful) sign, those who say things like, “Don’t put God in a box,” or, “If just one person is helped, then it’s worth it and absolutely a move of God,” will almost assuredly not take the time to ask the vital questions above.

CHAPTER 5

DISCERNING DEALBREAKERS

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

(2 John 1:9-11)

When it comes to possible all-or-nothing issues, here are some examples of potential dealbreakers which will likely make a church, movement, pastor, leader, ministry, or book something to avoid altogether—and which we should expose and warn others about as well.

- **A DIFFERENT JESUS** | If they have a *different Jesus* (2 Cor 11:3-4). This does not just apply to Jehovahs Witnesses, Mormons, etc. Many today have crafted a different savior into a socialist, leftist Jesus.

For more, see our book on the subject: **Jesus Was A Socialist?** and Warren Smith's **"Another Jesus" Calling**

- **A DIFFERENT GOSPEL** | If they have a *different gospel*, especially by distorting or diminishing the message of the cross (e.g., the social gospel; 2 Cor 11:3-4; Gal 1:6-9; Phil 3:18-20) See: *The Gospel*
- **LOW VIEW OF SCRIPTURE** | If they have a *low view*, or an *adversarial view of God's written Word* often by subtly undermining the Word (Gen 3:1ff; cp. Matt 4:1-11), and elevating man's wisdom or their own ideas and teachings (Matt 15:1-9)
- **POOR TEACHING OF THE WORD** | If they *handle the Word of God poorly* (Jer 8:8-9; 2 Pet 3:15-16; cp. 2 Tim 2:15)
- **HOSTILE TO BIBLE BELIEVERS** | If they are hostile to those who have a *high view of God's Word* (1 Kgs 18:17ff; 2 Chron 36:15-16; Neh 9:26; Ps 50:17; cp. Ps 18:30; 19:7-11; 138:2)
- **FAIL TO WARN** | If they do not *accurately and openly warn* of counterfeits, errors, and false teachers (Eph 5:6-11; Jude 1:3ff; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet 2:1ff)
- **EMBRACE WORLDLY WISDOM** | If they are embracing and *espousing the world's wisdom* (1 Cor 1:17ff; 2:6ff; 3:18-30; Ps 1:1-3; Col 2:8; Jer 2:13)
- **SEEK WORLDLY APPROVAL** | If they *conform their theology to the world* in order to appease and win the world (Jas 4:4; Rom 12:2), which produces *World-Approved Christianity*

- **CONFORM TO THE WORLD** | If they are *conforming to the spirit of the age* (1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Cor 2:6ff; Eph 4:14; 1 Jn 4:5-6; e.g., postmodernism; humanism; woke-ism)
- **COUNTERFEITS** | If they have bought into and are *spreading counterfeits*, particularly a *counterfeit love* (e.g., enabling and affirming sin) or a *counterfeit justice* (Jude 1:4; Jer 23:14-22; 2 Cor 11:13-15)
- **GROUPTHINK** | If they are more *focused on telling you what to think*, rather than teaching you how to think, how to understand, how to discern, how love and discernment are inseparable, how to grow in wisdom and dependency on the Word of God, and how to test and approve all things through God's Word (1 Thess 5:21-22; 1 Jn 4:1-6; Acts 17:11; Heb 5:14)
- **SUBJECTIVE** | If they are more *subjective-dependent* and *subjective-driven* (e.g., feelings; mysticism; man's wisdom; experiences) rather than *objective-dependent* (the written Word; using reason and thinking objectively; Acts 17:11)
- **ABUSIVE** | If they are *abusive, controlling, legalistic*, and try to put people under the Old Covenant (e.g., guilt/shame/performance-based) and not grace, truth, and the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:5-18; Gal 3:1ff; Gal 5:1ff)
- **PASSIVE** | If they are *not boldly taking a stand* against, and bravely confronting the enemies, evil, and error that are attacking God's Word, biblical Christianity, and all of

humanity (2 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Kgs 18:17ff; 22:9ff; Eph 5:6-11; 6:10-20; Ti 1:9ff)

- **ENABLERS** | If they *join with those* who have one or more of the above traits (2 Jn 1:7-11; 2 Cor 6:14ff; Eliashib with Tobiah in Neh 13:4-9)

In addition to the traits in the list above, churches or leaders will also certainly possess some truth, and provide some good things. And there will be individuals included here who are charming, likable, and very gifted communicators. However, given how deception works—and given how deadly the above aspects are—if one or more are present, then it is highly likely we should reject them as a whole (e.g., “have *no fellowship* with the unfruitful works of darkness”).

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

(Ephesians 5:8-11)

What is more, the errors in this list go far beyond “a little leaven.” They are huge. Either way, big or small, these errors are guaranteed to work their way through the whole batch of dough. It is clearly wise, then, to completely avoid all error, no matter the size.

To be clear, these are not always dealbreakers all the time—but it is close to being all of the time. And some of them should, by themselves, always warrant an absolute rejection (e.g., a different Jesus; a different gospel; the spirit of the age; hostile to those who have a high view of God’s Word).

In addition, we certainly want to give people grace, and love them by challenging them if they are in error (e.g., Jas 5:19-20; 2 Tim 2:24-26). Every one of us is prone to being deceived. Therefore, we need to always first examine our own hearts and beliefs (Matt 7:1-5; 1 Tim 4:16), and then lovingly exhort others where need be.

CHAPTER 6

THERE IS ALWAYS A TEST

There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.

(Proverbs 14:12)

With all of this in mind—and to reveal just how insidious the Deceiver is, how challenging discernment can be, and gain insight into how counterfeits work—always remember this: even if a person, church, or movement produces an *actual* miracle—or gives a prophecy that *does come true*—or there is some *actual* good involved (cp. Gen 3:6), that does not *necessarily* mean this is good and from God (e.g., Ex 7:10-11; Deut 13:1ff; Matt 7:22-23).

However, if we make a quick decision in that scenario, based on the *initial* good presented, then, by our folly, we are sure to be beguiled—not to mention perhaps deceive and harm others as well (Prov 14:12; 18:13).

This is precisely how a “Con Man” operates. He first builds *confidence* in his target audience (“con” is short for “confidence”) by providing something that is, in fact, good.

Nevertheless, even though there is some genuine good involved, it is, as a whole, one big scheme to deceive (e.g., a Ponzi scheme; cp. Gen 3:6; Josh 9:3ff).

So, when it comes to matters like these, *a test is always involved*, or at least there should be. In fact, Scripture tells us that this could be *God testing us* (Deut 8:2; 13:1ff; 1 Chron 29:17). Either way, we should always test everything, especially that which claims to be of God and helpful for others (1 Thess 5:21-22; 1 Jn 4:1-6; Acts 17:11; see also Matt 7:15-23; 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9-12). If you were not taught these critical aspects of life, deception, and discernment, then please ask your pastor about them.

... you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

(Deuteronomy 13:3)

Additionally, if a person tries to dissuade you from asking genuine questions—or discourages you from attempting to thoroughly examine and biblically vet a movement, book, church, leader, or the latest trend—that is pretty much a red flag the size of Kentucky.

Worse, if they are quick to declare something to be true, biblical, and of God, and then insist that others agree with them—and perhaps pressure and shame them if they do not—this, too, is a massive warning sign. And it certainly is not a good sign for that individual.

Even more, if they judge, scoff at, or condemn you—for the crime of waiting, asking questions, challenging assumptions, and using Scripture—with statements like, “You’re a pharisee ... Don’t put God in a box ... You have a critical spirit ... Who are you to question a move of God? ... Some people are cynics ... You’re just a heresy hunter,” then they lose a ton of biblical credibility overall, but particularly when it comes to discernment.

Notice that the behavior in the three paragraphs above not only dumb-down our discernment, they also tend to produce unthinking *echo chambers*. This, then, creates *groupthink*, which is one of the deadliest things known to mankind. With the decline in discernment and rise of groupthink, is it any wonder the Church is so weak today, or why so many are falling for obvious counterfeits, like wokeism and leftism? We actually have a book coming out soon on this subject.

Note: According to Merriam-Webster, *groupthink* is “a pattern of thought characterized by **self-deception, forced manufacture of consent**, and *conformity to group values and ethics*.” Compare the traits and actions surrounding groupthink with the godliest leaders in God’s Word, such as: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Jeremiah, Micaiah, John the

Baptist, Paul, and, of course, Jesus—as well as the highly praised group of individuals, the Bereans, for their actions in discernment (Acts 17:11). Not only were all of these people the definition of anti-groupthink, they were unwavering in their passion for the truth, the Word, true love, and wanting others to discern for themselves.

CHAPTER 7

DIFFERING DISCERNERS

Teach me good discernment and knowledge,
For I believe in Your commandments.

(Psalm 119:66, NASB)

Whatever someone may judge “discerners” to be (and as Christians, we should all be included in this group), what we want is fairly straightforward: to examine everything to make sure it is true and biblical, and not misleading and harmful, so that we can truly love God and others.

In other words, we are simply asking questions and scrutinizing what is proposed as biblical in order to *follow what God has repeatedly commanded us to do*: to test the spirits, and to *test all things* according to God’s written Word. All of this should, of course, be done out of love, and in order to help others know the truth and avoid error and harm.

If any Christian does not encourage you in such an endeavor, and, instead, discourages you in discerning and testing all things, then they have revealed most, if not all, you need to know about their desire for discernment—and, perhaps, the truth as a whole.

When it comes to you, personally, never let yourself be shamed into rashly declaring something to be of God, or not of God (or rushing to judge someone as guilty or not guilty). Always faithfully do your own due diligence in such things—and anything else that comes about—all out of love for God and others. And then lovingly warn others whenever you find error, unbiblical practices, and false teachings.

Like any group, there is a spectrum of quality when it comes to those who are very active in discerning, and in sharing their findings with others (e.g., in books; articles; websites; ministries). Sadly, some of these individuals are actually lacking discernment, which is the very thing they claim to be all about. And there are others who are good in some areas of discerning, yet weak in other areas.

One smaller segment are those individuals who have less than ideal motivations. While a few common goals are money and prestige (fame, followers, and clicks), some are largely driven by *bitterness*. This condition will, of course, distort a person's ability to be objective, to reason and to be reasonable, to be loving, and to see and discern *clearly*—all of which are the very things that are absolutely essential for discernment (cp. Ps 73:21-22; Jas 3:16). In many ways, their

attitude, actions, and fruit are the same as pre-saved Paul (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-5).

Sadly, those in this group often have an agenda that is less about discerning and loving others, and far more about destroying other individuals or organizations. They have likely been hurt by one or more people, usually in a certain group (real or perceived offenses, but usually real); therefore, they have an axe to grind and are effectively pursuing their pound of flesh. This is often revealed in their attitude and tone (e.g., hostility; rage; lack of objectivity)—in *False Summary Judgments*—and in stubbornness and a defiant refusal to accept correction, and openly and contritely admit sin and error.

Consequently, rather than objectively and carefully separate any good from bad, we see emotionally-driven reactions like, “A-ha! Look what I found. He said _____! Therefore, he is totally evil, and anyone who has anything to do with him is evil! And we must take down and destroy him!”

*For more, see our article on **Overcorrection Syndrome***

Note: Again, there are people, teachings, and movements that should be rejected outright, while others are a mixed-bag.

Then there are those people who might be accurate in discerning—at least here or there—but are horrible in how they handle any issue that arises. As a result, they do far more damage than good. They are often mean-spirited and

unloving in their approach, thereby pushing people away (who could otherwise learn from an issue) rather than drawing them in.

Making it even worse, often such individuals, when called on these things, are snarky and belligerent toward those who challenge their caustic ways (and/or their erroneous discernment). They are also usually quick to rationalize and justify their harshness by pointing to people in Scripture who rebuked others. As a result, they not only give discernment a bad name, but many in the Church become desensitized to the need for discernment. They will then tend to roll their eyes and scoff at all “discerners” and discernment ministries—largely thanks to these destructive discerners.

Related to this last group, there are many who can be very prideful, and develop an intellectual and elitist-type attitude. Some here may even see themselves as the supreme discernment-type person. All of this can also happen as much, if not more, in apologetics-type circles.

For more, see our article on **Destructive Discerners**

On a personal note, we have been blessed over the years to know several individuals who are very biblical—and quite skilled at discerning—along with being respectful in how they go about doing it.

CHAPTER 8

A PAINFUL LESSON TO REMEMBER

The simple believes every word,
But the prudent considers well his steps.

(Proverbs 14:15)

Let's add even more perspective to the danger of dissuading people from discerning.

Given what the entire world just went through the past few years (with massive censorship—and forced vaccines, lockdowns, etc.—and the demonization of all who questioned this, the prevailing narratives, and the “settled science” that was always shifting, wholly ambiguous, and mostly wrong)—and in the age of false narratives, fake news, and error-filled initial reporting—and with ever-growing totalitarianism and groupthink in our society, if there is one thing we should agree on it is this: to encourage everyone to objectively think for themselves, to ask hard questions, to spot and avoid all error and groupthink, and to *wait before they jump to conclusions*, especially on matters that others are demanding to be absolutely true.

If we have learned anything, it should be that we must never shun or shame others because they want to take time before deciding on what others have quickly and summarily judged—or worse, insisted that they go along with.

He who answers a matter before he hears it,
It is folly and shame to him.
(Proverbs 18:13)

Instead, we should always love God and others by thinking biblically and objectively, relying on objective standards, asking objective questions, wrestling with what we do know, waiting for more outcomes which will give us additional information, and filtering everything through the divine, objective, unchanging standard of God’s written Word. Is that not what you would want your kids to do? Is that not how you want all your loved ones to function? Should that not be a minimum requirement for all leaders?

However, if a pastor or leader is not doing this (which can happen even with good people) and if they are not exhorting and teaching others to do the same, then you should directly challenge them on this (2 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Thess 5:14; 1 Ti 1:9ff) and highly encourage them to make serious changes. If they don’t respond well, then that’s another red flag *bigger* than Kentucky (Prov 9:7-9; 15:5, 10, 31-31).

Worse, if they shame and scoff at those doing what God clearly commands all of us to do—then ... well ... you can make up your own mind concerning that person. But you

should do so objectively—not rashly, nor with emotion-driven decisions—and out of love, according to God’s written Word (cp. 1 Pet 3:15).

In the bigger picture, and of far bigger concern, the overall lack of biblical discernment is a top reason why the Church is so weak and ineffective today, and why our world is in such a dark place, and getting darker by the day. This decline in discernment has coincided with the decline of the Church—and the death of truth in some situations (cp. Is 59:13-15; Jer 7:28)—not to mention the dismal influence the Church has on non-believers.

Yet, take heart. All of this *can* change.

How, you ask? When it comes to our responsibilities, the simple answer is in three parts:

THINK | First, stop discouraging people from asking hard questions, for thinking for themselves, and for not believing everything that pops up, especially what is trending and trendy.

DISCERN | Second, increasingly practice ardent and accurate discernment—and encourage others to do the same—and ask your church to equip their local group of believers in biblical discernment, and in every biblical truth.

DELIGHT | Third, increasingly depend on and delight in God and His Word of truth, and base your love and all your beliefs on God’s perfect Word of life.

CHAPTER 9

THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Speaking of equipping, just as the Church needs more leaders who are truly bold and biblical, the whole Church needs to be “*thoroughly equipped*” (see also Eph 4:11-5:2). With this divine goal in mind, we will dive even deeper in order to be better equipped to discern and to love God and others.

Being a good and godly leader in the Church is hard work. Nevertheless, this is not something a person should shrink from or minimize. It is a very good thing. What is more, this is absolutely necessary to love others, to love God, and to please and be approved by Him. And this due diligence especially applies in one vital area: how we (and especially anyone in leadership) *handle God’s Word*.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(2 Timothy 2:15)

When it comes to loving God and others—not just with words or good intentions, but with actions and in truth (e.g., 1 Jn 3:18)—here are a few bare-minimum essentials for doing so. While the attributes below should generally apply to all believers, more specifically, these characteristics should be true of Christian pastors, leaders, and anyone involved with churches, revivals, movements, books, and ministries.

- **GOD'S WORD** | They should be very concerned that God's Word of truth is rightly divided and accurately taught (2 Tim 2:15; Ti 1:9ff)—and not distorted, twisted, or added to (2 Pet 2:1ff; 3:16; Jude 1:4ff; Matt 15:6-9)—and they must openly and highly exhort others to rely on and follow God's written Word (Is 8:19-20; Acts 17:11).
- **ACTIVE LOVE** | They should be very concerned about the people potentially impacted by this current thing (book; revival; practice)—in particular, that they would not be deceived and therefore harmed—but, rather, encouraged, strengthened, and equipped in God's Word of truth and His love (Eph 4:11-5:2; Matt 7:13-27).

- **TESTING EVERYTHING** | They should *insist* that everyone objectively “test the spirits” (1 Jn 4:1-6), and “test all things” (e.g., the actions, assertions, and teachings involved), and, if possible, teach them how to do this, all according to the written Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 5:21-22; Is 8:19-20). If not—and if they do the opposite by dissuading people from doing this—then they will grieve God, mislead themselves, and will likely mislead and harm others (2 Tim 3:13; cp. 1 Tim 4:12-16; 1 Pet 3:15).
- **THE TRUTH** | They should be very concerned about the truth, and all aspects of truth—and how it is connected to our life, love, and salvation—while detecting, avoiding, and openly alerting others to all error and false teachings (Eph 5:6-11; Ezek 33:1ff; 2 Jn 1:7-11).
- **THE NEW COVENANT** | They should be very concerned that others know and live in love (1 Jn 4:16), in *full* grace and truth—and with and for the person of Jesus, and His Word—all of which gives us life and true freedom (Jn 1:14-17; 8:31-32; 2 Cor 3:5-18), while not being burdened (again) by behaviorism, legalism, guilt, shaming, being put back under the law and the Old Covenant (cp. Gal 3:1-11; Gal 5:1ff; Rom 8:1ff).
- **ARDENT DISCERNMENT** | They should be very concerned about discernment, and practice discernment in all that they see, read, and hear, and encourage everyone else in this life-or-death matter (Acts 17:11; Phil 1:9-11; 1 Kgs 3:9-11; Heb 5:14).

- **LOVE** | They should be very concerned about the motivation involved, and that all things are done out of love—a love for God and others—and to glorify God and build His kingdom (1 Cor 13:1-8; 16:14; Mk 12:30-31), and to keep in mind that *love, truth, and discernment are inseparable* (Phil 1:9-11; 1 Jn 3:18; 1 Cor 13:6).
- **DEPENDENCY & OBJECTIVITY** | They should encourage people to depend on objective truth and sources (God’s written Word) rather than depending on *subjectivity* (e.g., feelings; mysticism; emotions; man’s wisdom; experiences; cp. Heb 5:12-14; Is 8:19-20; Acts 17:11).
- **WARNING OF COUNTERFEITS** | They should be vigilant concerning the many *counterfeits* out there, be able to discern them, openly warn others, help equip others to spot them, and even tell others about specific counterfeits (e.g., the social gospel; a socialist Jesus; cp. Eph 5:6-11; 2 Cor 2:11).
- **ANTI-CHRISTIAN PREDATORS** | They should be very concerned about all of the “imposters,” “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” “false teachers,” and “false brothers” in the mix—those who *give the appearance of being for us, and for Jesus*, yet seek to deceive and harm others, and subvert biblical Christianity and replace it with a counterfeit. And they should ardently work toward spotting these wolves, warning others, and even confronting them (e.g., 2 Cor 11:13-15; Matt 7:13-23; Gal 2:4-5; 2 Pet 2:1ff; Jude 1:4ff).

- **THINKING BIBLICALLY** | They should be very concerned that others increasingly think biblically, and think for themselves, all while not falling into some kind of groupthink (Acts 17:11; 1 Kgs 18:17ff; 22:9ff).
- **DISTINCT FROM THE WORLD** | They should be very concerned about being wholly distinct from, and not conforming in any way to what the world wants or believes, or aligning with the world's wisdom or the latest spirit of the age (1 Jn 2:15-17; 4:5-6; Rom 12:2; Jas 4:4; 1 Cor 3:18-20; Jn 15:18-19; Col 2:8).
- **SOLUTIONS TO SIN** | They should be very concerned about sin, and the consequences of sin (cp. Jer 23:14 with Jer 23:21-22)—as we know, there is nothing God takes more seriously than these—and abundantly and accurately explain the solutions (e.g., grace; truth; Jesus; repentance; God's Word). This should especially include the one, true gospel being conspicuously taught.

For more, see our article: **[False Teachers & Sin](#)**

We need to have realistic expectations, and live in and give grace, while never, ever compromising truth or biblical principles. Just as we cannot expect perfection in ourselves or our leaders, we also cannot compromise in these critical areas of life, love, and Christianity. With that in mind—and being objective and gracious—how would you rate yourself, and the leaders you know in the areas above (0 to 10)?

While many weighty matters are on this list, it includes the vital essentials for measuring church leaders, and for those involved with the latest thing in the Church (a popular book, a revival, “an important tool” Christians should use such as the Enneagram, CRT, humanistic psychology, etc.). This is also important for accurately assessing the thing itself (e.g., book, teaching, etc.).

So, whenever something new shows up on the Christian scene (a popular book, leader, revival, tool), and those involved do not possess the characteristics listed above, what will likely happen? What is the likelihood that deception will occur, and many will be led away from the truth faith, and untold numbers of people greatly harmed? And what might this say about those involved?

CHAPTER 10

CYNICAL OR LOVING?

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 1:4)

In one specific example of subtly discouraging people from being discerning, here is a public response to the happenings at Asbury University from an Instagram post (which was “liked” almost thirty thousand times) by popular Christian author and teacher, Jennie Allen,:

“It’s ok if you are cynical. You’ve been trained to suspect foul play under every possible God thing. That part of you that doubts or has to discern always is tired and has worked hard in a world with a million opinions and events thrown at you all day.”

Her post continued with this:

“We’ve all had to decide what we believe and what is true about every big moment and issue of our day. We are tired. But Gen z isn’t. They are just desperate. They are plagued with fear and grief and confusion and they just want hope and God to be real and there for them.

So they see it when He shows up. If you are the cynic. It’s ok. But watch.... You are about to see God move anyway.”

So much could be said here, but we will try to limit our response. While she likely had good intentions, this is more than a little confusing, misleading, and discouraging.

Rather than a sentence-by-sentence break down of her statements, we will summarize them and then respond. While doing our best not to misrepresent her words, this is how it comes across:

“For those cynical people out there, for those who have to always discern ... I’m sorry you’ve been trained to be overly suspicious of everything, and to doubt and assume the bad in every possible God thing. But just let all that concern go ... for *this*. Why? Because *this* is surely of God. How do I know for sure? I can’t give you any concrete or biblical

reasons ... I just know ... and, well ... Gen Z needs *this*. And they need hope. Therefore, this must be of God, and we should not question it. And Gen Z sees it when God shows up, and *you* won't. So be the cynic, if you must, but God is about to move even with your cynicism. And if you're still cynical, you will miss out."

We can all word things poorly, and wish we said something differently. However, given what she wrote, the above is essentially what she said. When people communicate there are three things to consider: what they intended to say, what they actually said, and how this is understood by and impacts their audience.

We would gladly hear clarifications—especially when it comes to her assertion that, because Gen Z wants and needs God and hope, and is desperate, this somehow is the critical criteria that makes Asbury an authentic revival. Or how being "plagued with fear and grief and confusion" helps people more accurately see the things of God, while "those who have to always discern" will not see this. Of course, the opposite is true.

We would also love to see clarification—and some specifics given—regarding her prediction that "You are about to see God move anyway." Better yet, if we do not see God move, then what will she (and others) say about that? No doubt, some will point to a subjective, impossible-to-substantiate aspect, like, "So many people were touched by God." Unfortunately, statements like that do not prove or disprove anything.

Expanding this particular problem to the Church at large, I have been in various churches, conferences, and Christian camps in various cities for 40+ years, and I have heard numerous people say (especially in the last two or three years, particularly related to politics) something like, “God is about to _____.” Sometimes these speculations include specifics, but usually they are ambiguous (e.g., God is about to do “something big,” “something special”). Either way, these predictions/prophecies—specifically, the ones that say, “about to”—have never come true. Not once.

What is more, we all make mistakes, but I have never observed any kind of ownership of these failed predictions/prophecies, especially from self-proclaimed prophets or prophetesses (to be clear, Allen is not claiming to be a prophetess). Nor have I seen any true contrition, or actual consequences for those who mislead and hurt others with these unfulfilled promises of what God is “about to do”. However, if there are no repercussions, if there is no repentance, then these falsehoods will certainly continue to be thrown out there. And many will be deceived and harmed.

So, overall, is it possible for a person to not immediately believe in this (or any other) revival—and to ask hard questions—and to not be labeled as a cynic? Just because people do not buy into something—or have questions, or want to wait and objectively observe over a period of time in order to test it, as God instructs us—this does not mean they are cynical, or wrong.

Nor does this mean they do not want a move of God, or do not want to help and bless Gen Z, and others. In fact, they long for a genuine move of God, one that is unquestionably based on and does not conflict with God's Word of truth. We cannot know this for sure, however, without *thoroughly* testing the spirits, and testing everything according to Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 5:21-22; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

Nevertheless, Allen was *very quick to judge* this event in the affirmative. And, while this might not have been her main intent, she was rash in judging others in the negative, and in subtly dismissing them and their concerns. She also said it is okay to be cynical, when it is not okay—nor is it okay to falsely ascribe this to others. In addition, she made her judgments before weighing as much information as possible (cp. Prov 18:13, 15, 17; Prov 17:15; Phil 1:9-11).

When told by God that he could ask Him for anything, Solomon asked for an “understanding heart”—which, when taken literally, means a *hearing* heart (i.e., a heart that keenly listens in order to accurately discern, fully understand, and then make wise decisions). Why was this the one thing at the top of his list? Solomon's chief desire was to be able to “*discern* between good and bad,” right from wrong, truth from error—so that he could rightly lead his people.

Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours? (1 Kings 3:9)

As we know, Solomon’s request abundantly pleased God. For that, and many other reasons, we, too, should pray for the same thing, and live accordingly. How many people do you know who have that kind of “hearing heart”?

Yes, Gen Z is desperate—and for good reason. And there are many reasons why they are fearful and confused. The time we live in is exceptionally dark—and the generations before have failed them in more ways than one, especially when it comes to love, truth, discernment, and exposing counterfeits.

Therefore, what Gen Z needs is *true* and lasting hope, from the one and only true God, according to His Word of truth (e.g., Rom 15:4, 13). And, in contrast, the very *last* things they (or any other generation) need are:

- To fall for a **counterfeit** (God, gospel, revival, or anything else)
- To be given a **false** hope
- To not be openly warned and taught about counterfeits and other **dangers**
- To put their hope in what is **subjective** and uncertain, rather than what is unchanging, objective, and always sure and true (Rom 15:4)
- To be told **what** to believe

- To be merely told **who** and what is right, and who and what is wrong
- To not be taught **how** to think for themselves
- To **not** discern
- To not be taught **how** to discern
- To be **discouraged** from testing and discerning all things
- To not have others—especially Church **leaders**—watch over and protect them, in order to love and bless them, and to give them the true hope they need
- To **not** be taught how discernment and love are inseparable, and to be equipped in how to live this love out on a daily basis, especially when it comes to the next new thing

Yet all this, and more, will likely happen if we follow the direction of Allen, and others like her.

Yes, let's all pray for multiple moves of God. However, we do not control whether there is a true revival or not. But we do fully control how well we love and seek to protect Gen Z (and everyone else), especially with the truth, and by

teaching and encouraging them to always practice and apply discernment, according to God's Word of life.

... that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

(Philippians 2:15-16)

CHAPTER 11

TODAY'S PIVOTAL DEPENDENCY

For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me,
the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns
—broken cisterns that
can hold no water.

(Jeremiah 2:13)

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

(Psalm 1:1-2)

At the heart of what is creating so much deception, division, and destruction in our world—and in the Church—is one main dichotomy: *subjectivity vs. objectivity*.

A deeper understanding is this:

Subjectivity:

There is a growing group of people who are increasingly depending upon, and whose beliefs are largely determined by, what is *subjective* (e.g., feelings; emotions; mysticism; experiences; man's wisdom; humanism/psychology; and other biased sources, like the media and social media; peer pressure, and conforming to what others think).

Subjectivity is not, by definition, tied to objective, unchanging truth. As a result, subjective beliefs can and will frequently change. Therefore, X can be bad and harmful today, and good and loving tomorrow, and something entirely different next Wednesday (Eph 4:14). Note: Similarly, *un-objective* = "not possessing or representing objective reality."

Objectivity:

On the other hand, there is a shrinking group of people who generally depend on *objectivity* (thinking objectively) and *objective sources* (the main source being God's written Word).

[Objective = not dependent on the mind for existence; external to the mind; not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or opinions in considering and representing facts; unbiased; based on facts]

To be clear, feelings are very important. They were created for us by God to bless us and protect us. More specifically, He designed them to be **indicators** and **motivators**, but *not dictators*. Nevertheless, many today live as if their feelings essentially determine truth, or can trump reality, and they allow their feelings or moods to determine most, if not all, of their decisions.

Subjectivity vs. Objectivity is not a matter of one or the other. There is a spectrum between these two groups. So, as objectively as you can, please answer these questions:

If *totally subjective-driven* is 0, and *totally objective-based* is a 10, what number would you assign to yourself? What number would you give to overall society? What about the Church at large? What about your favorite Church leaders? What about some of your favorite authors?

We have all been beguiled, but in which group is a person more likely to be misled, seduced, and deceived: subjective or objective?

What does that tell us about our need for discernment and objectivity, as well as the need to decrease our society's dependence on these subjective sources?

CHAPTER 12

UNITY ON DISCERNMENT & TRUTH-BASED LOVE

My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God.
(Proverbs 2:1-5)

Finally, as believers in Christ, let us love each other by encouraging one another to shine the light on all matters, to depend on God and objective truth, to passionately discern, and to think biblically, so that we can grow in His love, truth, and grace and allow that to overflow to others.

Also, take note of anyone (particularly leaders) who might shame believers for asking hard questions, for not quickly affirming the latest thing, for thoroughly testing all things, and for vetting everything by the Word of God. And especially take note of those who practice *False Summary Judgments*, either subtly or overtly.

When it comes to these individuals, perhaps they simply had a moment of weakness. Maybe they were shamed in similar ways. Quite possibly, they were not taught the vital importance of discernment, and how this is inseparable from true love. Maybe they were genuinely saved, but were taught erroneously. Whatever the case, let's exhort them with the truth, out of love, so that they, and hopefully others, will avoid so much needless heartache, and will be increasingly blessed in the Lord and His love.

... For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him

who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

(Ephesians 4:12-16)



MORE RESOURCES

For more on the subject of biblical discernment, these resources are available from the ministry of Hope For Life, along with many others, at [HopeForLifeOnline.com](https://www.hopeforlifeonline.com)

- **Counterfeits: The Enemy's Greatest Weapon**
- **Biblical Discernment**
- **7 Deadly Errors Destroying The Church**
- **Why The Truth Matters**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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