



## **DISCERNING THE BOUNDARIES OF TRUTH**

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In 1946 a tsunami hit the city of Hilo on the Big Island in Hawaii. This happened before the advent of warning systems to let people know a giant wave was coming. Even still, there were many warning signs the people missed.

One sign that a tsunami is headed toward land is that all of the tide water gets sucked out away from the shore, receding much farther than in a normal tide.

But in 1946, when the locals saw the water receding and all the seashells uncovered and all the fish flopping around on the shore, they were fascinated rather than frightened. So rather than run, they went in closer for a better look.

Local fishermen thought, “This is literally like grabbing fish in a barrel. This is easy. Just throw these fish that are flopping around into a net.” Kids flooded the shoreline to collect the exposed shells.

It was like a community party.

Tragically, they had no idea that a massive wave was on its way. When it finally hit land, 160 unsuspecting people lost their lives in the rushing water.

The tragedy in Hilo sparked calls for an early warning system that could save lives.

Now, buoys way out in the ocean help detect a wave that’s bigger than normal. Their unnatural movement triggers an alert hours in advance to warn people of a pending tsunami.

When my wife and I lived in Hawaii some years ago, we had the opportunity to experience one of these tsunami warnings. When you hear the warning, you don’t go in for a closer look. You say, “Okay, we’ve got to get away from the beach.”

As I’ve been thinking through the times that we’re living in, I can’t help but feel a little bit like we’re those people that are going out and collecting shells while a deadly tsunami races towards us.

Something is brewing in the world around us and not enough warning bells are going off in our minds.

In Luke 12, we find Jesus talking to the crowds. And when this happens, it means He’s talking to us, too. Starting in verse 54, Jesus says...

*He said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?” (Luke 12:54–56 NIV)*



Do you see what Jesus is saying here? He is talking about discerning the times that we are in.

It's critical for us to understand the times that we're living in. Because right now our culture is facing a huge spiritual problem... and the church is not immune to its effects.

The Barna Group recently found that the percentage of people in America who have a biblical worldview is only 6% overall, and only 1% for adults 30 years of age and under.

Barna defines a biblical worldview as believing that:

- Absolute moral truth exists.
- The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches.
- Satan is a real being or force, not merely symbolic.
- A person cannot earn their way into Heaven by being good or doing good works.
- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth.
- God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.

Only 1% of Americans age 30 and under believe those six tenets. If you look at the ages of 18 and under, the number goes down even more. Only about half of people under 18 holds to a biblical worldview.

Even more alarming, 8 out of 10 kids who grow up in the church don't come back when they're adults.

This is a problem – and we can't afford to ignore the warning signals.

One encouraging note though, is that if a child grows up in a family where the mom and the dad are both committed to God and attend church regularly, the chances of that kid growing up and going to church is actually 95%.

A parent who takes their faith and church attendance seriously absolutely shifts the entire game for a child.

But what about those 8 out of 10 young people who walk away from Jesus and don't return? Why do they leave? This is how it typically plays out:

Kids grow up without a robust biblical worldview – one that can withstand the world's scrutiny. Then they go to a college where they're asked questions they cannot answer, and it makes them question their faith. We're failing our kids because we're sending them into the world ill-prepared to answer tough questions.



The church needs to be the place where people can ask hard questions. We need to be the place that says, “Okay, if you don’t know why it’s reliable to trust Scripture, let’s have a conversation about it. Because Scripture is a very reliable source to serve as the foundation for your life.”

Our job in the church is to help people establish strong root systems that sink deep into the truth of God’s Word so they can stand firm in their beliefs in a hostile and skeptical world. Because our faith *is* reliable, our faith *is* true, and there *is* a ton of data backing that up.

As Christians, we have to discern what’s going on in the world around us, so we can be prepared for the times ahead.

Like the buoys that detect changes in the water and alert locals to the coming wave, we need to pay attention to the early warning signs of danger in our culture.

So what are some of these early warning signs that we need to be attuned to? While there are certainly many, I believe two in particular pose a serious threat.

### **The Rise of Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is a response to the worldview called Modernism that dominated culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernism was marked by science, technology, and the belief that people could utilize knowledge to ultimately progress towards a more peaceful, unified society.

Then when Modernism failed to produce this society – producing instead terrifying events like advanced and global warfare – Postmodernism developed in reaction. Largely a cynical movement, Postmodernism encourages people to pursue their own meaning according to their own desires. More importantly, it rejects the idea of truth.

Postmodernism gave rise to phrases that we hear all the time today like “You do you” and “Live your truth.” Such relativity and rejection of objective reality are common traits of Postmodern thinking.

As Postmodernism permeated our culture, it even started to sneak into the church, and that’s a very dangerous thing. Truth is not a disposable concept. In John 8:32 Christ says, *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

Our whole faith is built on truth, and Postmodernism is diametrically opposed to truth. This leads to the second warning sign Christians must pay attention to.

### **The Secularization of the West**

The Western world continues to see a strong effort to remove God from government, from movies, from culture, from any sphere of public life. They promote the idea that you can and should achieve an entirely secular society that functions without God.



This is a complete fantasy. When you empty a society of God-given, God-grounded truth, the vacuum you create will be filled with something that's ultimately destructive of society.

Now, the question is, what are Christians to do?

I believe the response of the church has historically fallen into two camps.

One camp that's pretty common these days is the idea that we simply need to trust God with what's happening in the world, and not pay attention because it will be too discouraging.

And there is a kernel of truth to that. We do need to trust God and not be anxious.

So if you are addicted to the news... if you're getting stressed and depressed by the state of our society... then you need to recenter your heart on Jesus and His Kingdom. Otherwise, you'll lose track of the truth about who God is and what He's said in His Word. You'll also lose track of your friends and your family and the role God's called you to play in their lives.

At the same time, if are hiding yourself from what's going on in the news, you have to ask yourself if you are avoiding the news because it takes your eyes off of Jesus or are you ignoring the world because it's poking at an idol in your heart in a painful way?

I've personally had to wrestle with this. When I see something that makes me uncomfortable, I ask myself "Why? Is it because I think I'm entitled to be comfortable all the time in life?"

Maybe you hear about what's going on in the financial world and you don't want to hear about it because you've got a huge 401k and a healthy savings account. And if inflation gets worse, it's really going to hurt your sense of security or identity.

Now, there's nothing wrong with wise financial choices. That's biblical. But when our finances determine our identity, it's become an idol in place of God. And that's a serious matter.

So I think we all have to ask ourselves if we are avoiding the news because we don't want to be discouraged or because it's actually highlighting something that's not healthy in our heart.

The second camp Christians can fall into in response to the warning signs of our culture are those who recognize the seriousness of the season but are not overwhelmed by it.

I believe we need to be in this camp. We have to understand that the times we live in are hard. The times that we live in are showing us that the world and the system of the world is not something that we can rely on at all.

When the world around us becomes uncertain, does it knock us off of our faith? That's not the news's fault. That's our fault. We have to be a grounded people. We have to be people who are anchored in the truth, so when the news drowns us in bad news, we are not shaken.



Jesus said in Matthew 24:6, *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars.”* He’s not laying out a rosy situation at all. But then He continues and says, *“But see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”*

## We need to be aware but not alarmed.

Jesus called Peter to walk out on the water while a storm was raging. The storm was still going, the waves were chaotic, and the wind was blowing. And Jesus said, “Come walk on the water.”

This is very different than Moses having the waters parted in front of him. Moses had dry land to walk on. Peter did not. You and I don’t either.

Jesus is saying, “Come tread on the waves, come tread on the chaos. Come tread on the storm and come out to Me. Keep your eyes on Me. You can walk on top of this storm.”

That’s what we’re called to do. We are called to tread on the chaos. We need to be a people that are calm in the inner being of our heart because we know Jesus, because we have something better in us than what the world is telling us to rely on.

So as we step out into the chaos, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus and stay focused on the truth. And if we’re going to stay focused on the truth, we need to be a discerning people. We need a framework for discernment that helps us to understand the things that we’re up against.

One framework we can use is what I call the deception framework.

In Genesis 3, we see the first time that mankind is deceived by the enemy, Satan.

When you look at the times that we’re in, we’re witnessing the enemy use the same tactic he’s been using since the beginning of humanity’s existence. In Genesis 3, Satan tells Eve three lies that we still see at work in the world around us today.

### **Lie number one**

In Genesis 3:1, the serpent says, “Did God really say?” He’s denying God’s word. He’s putting questions in Eve’s mind about what God said. The enemy does that today. Our culture no longer trusts the Bible. People have been deceived.

There are forces coming against us asking, “Did God really say that? Did He really say that? Maybe there’s some nuance that you’re missing. Maybe there’s some backstory that you’re not getting.”

And the enemy always implants this question. He doesn’t come out and say God is lying to you. He questions if God is telling you the truth. He is sneaky about it. He’s trying to introduce the seed of doubt, so we begin to think, “Oh, maybe I can’t rely on that. Did God’s Word really say that?” It’s bringing into question the character of God.



## **Lie number two**

In Genesis 3:4 Satan says, “You will not certainly die.” He is denying God’s judgment. These days people, even many pastors, don’t like to talk about the judgment of God. It’s not fun. If I’m being honest, I don’t like talking about it either. But it is a reality of God’s character.

There are consequences here on this earth for what we do and what we say. More importantly, there are consequences afterward. If you don’t have the saving grace of Jesus in your life, covering those things up, there are real, eternal consequences. And the judgment of God is a true thing.

But the serpent is taking away the urgency of sin and saying, “Oh man, you’re not going to die. That’s not true. He’s just being melodramatic. Just take it easy. You’re not going to die. No big deal. Just eat of the fruit. It’s not going to hurt you. You’re going to be fine.”

And it leads him to his final statement.

## **Lie number three**

“You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). He says God really knows that if she eats of the fruit, she will be like God. He’s denying the authority of God and imparting it to the individual. We see that everywhere we look in today’s culture.

In our post-modern world, people are lifting themselves up to the place of God. Each person is their own arbiter of truth. And if we don’t feel good about it, then it must not be true.

But the Bible paints a very different picture. We do have something outside of ourselves that determines truth... a truth to which we are held accountable.

God, who has revealed Himself through His Word, is the arbiter of absolute truth.

So when we hear something in the news, or in culture, or even from the pulpit, and it’s not coming from a Christian perspective, it should set off an alarm in our heads. We need to be equipped to discern the truth. And the best thing we can do to prepare ourselves to discern the truth is to handle the truth.

When counterfeit detectors train to spot counterfeit money, one of the most important things they do is handle the real thing. They get intimately acquainted with genuine money – they handle and feel and smell and listen to how it sounds when they crinkle it up. So then when a counterfeit bill comes, they know something’s not right. They sense deception because they know truth so intimately.

This is our calling in this season. We need to get to know the Word of God. We need to handle the truth often. Because...



if we are not handling truth all the time, we are not going to spot the counterfeit.

What does that look like? It looks like a gospel-centered, biblically saturated life. It looks like reading the Word of God every day, even if it's just a little bit.

Handle a little bit of truth every day. It will start to seep into who you are. Spend time with the Holy Spirit. Spend time in prayer. Spend time listening for the voice of God and learn to hear Him above the noise of the culture's lies.

This is vitally important for a follower of Jesus, especially in the times that we live in right now.

Finally, be persistent in being part of a biblical community.

I've known a few people in the last few years that have walked away from Jesus. And most of the time it started with them not coming to church.

Church is not a club where we go sometimes to do all of our favorite things. No, church is so much more important than that. It's the place where iron sharpens iron. It's the place where you're challenged, and you're encouraged... it's a place where we plant deep roots in God's Word alongside other believers.

This is the season where we need a healthy root system in the Lord like never before.

We are in a spiritual battle. Recognizing this is going to be very helpful for the times that come. I think we really are witnessing a demonic oppression and something demonic in the world around us. I think that we are witnessing a generation that is being filled with something that's not of God. It's far beyond postmodern thought.

For us to be a people that tread on the chaos that we're living in, we have to have the right attitude toward what we're seeing. We can't just ignore it and put our heads down. We need to see it and realize that the enemy looks really strong, but Jesus is stronger. And when we keep our eyes on Him, it doesn't matter what the waves are doing, we're going to be fine.



### **Take Your Study Further**

*For verses about knowing truth: See Psalm 25:5, John 16:13, Ephesians 6:14, 1 John 4:6*

*For passages about discernment: See Hosea 14:9, John 7:24, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Philippians 1:9–10*

*For exhortation to gather with the body of Christ: Hebrews 10:24–25, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2*

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