



DISCERNMENT

FOR THOSE WHO ARE CONFUSED

The internet age has brought many benefits, among them, access to a rich variety of Christian ministry. However, the flip side of this abundance is a cacophony of voices, all demanding attention. The resulting confusion can be debilitating. How do we sift through all the voices, all claiming revelation, so as to take hold of what is good, and avoid being led astray?

Here are some simple principles. The 'speaker' cited below, may be a Christian leader, a prophet, a ministry, a musician, a writer, or simply a friend or acquaintance:

1. Long ago, the Church Fathers gave us the non-negotiable bones of our faith.

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.*

*And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit*

and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again,
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.
And will come again to judge the living and the dead.

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic (i.e. universal) church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

[The divine nature of the Son and the Spirit was further amplified in the Nicene Creed (325 AD)]

But added to those foundational truths are myriad interpretations of Scripture, all with different emphases according to revelation. And because no one ministry or stream has all the revelation—Paul says we know and see in part [1 Corinthians 13:9]—it is important that none of us should blindly follow anyone.

We have been given the Holy Spirit for the very purpose of guiding us into all truth. Never ignore His gentle pressure; if something feels ‘off’, don’t ignore it, check it out in Scripture. The internet is an invaluable resource for these purposes.

2. Look first at the *attitude* of the speaker: are they humble? Are they full of grace and love? Do they reflect the character of Christ? Remember, the only people Jesus had harsh words for, were the religious, the self-satisfied and the judgemental.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [Colossians 3:12]

3. Then think about *what* is being said. James has an important perspective here.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. [James 3:9-12]

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. [James 3:17-18]

4. Does the teaching or opinion agree with the 'main and plain' in Scripture, particularly with what Jesus said and did in the Gospels. He was the exact representation of the Father, so it's a good place to start.

5. What fruit is in evidence? Does the speaker produce the character of humility, grace and love in the lives of others; or people who are unteachable, strident, judgemental or legalistic?

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit... For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him... [Matthew 12:33-37]

6. Finally, don't just drink from one 'well'. As no ministry, stream or person has complete revelation, or a perfect grasp on truth, it is important to hear from other Christian worldviews—with the above safety factors in place. There is a rich treasure to be found in the family of God; let's search it out!

Learning to discern where people are coming from, helps us guard against getting caught up in error, and the resultant hurt. We need to remove ourselves from anything toxic, without flaring up in self-righteous judgement; and then take and bless what is good, and, realising that we are all imperfect learners—pray for each other.