

Learn to Discern: How to Determine What Is True

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 14, 2020



We are in a war – a war of ideas, a war of beliefs, a war of perspectives, a war of values, a war of cultures; we are in a war for your mind. Do you recognize it? Do you feel your mind being assaulted by warring factions?

And most of these groups are not interested in your individuality, your ability to think and reason – they don't want to teach you how to discern, to figure out what is actually true. No! Most of the factions warring for your mind are seeking to indoctrinate you, to propagandize you, to program you to their views, methods, and beliefs.

But God has given you individuality – your own capacity to think, reason, and choose – your own mind. And it is God's design that you exercise your abilities to think and to develop the ability to discern by putting your God-given reasoning powers to use. This is why the Bible teaches that every person must be fully persuaded in their own mind (Romans 14:5) and that the mature are those who, by practice, have developed the ability to discern the right from the wrong (Hebrews 5:14).

At Come and Reason Ministries, we aren't here to tell you what to think or believe. No! We are here to

help you exercise your God-given abilities to think and reason for yourself and become a person who possesses the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) – a person who can differentiate truth from lies efficiently.

Below are a few tools that you can use and actions you can implement to help grow your ability to differentiate fact from fiction, right from wrong, and truth from error.

Establish a Reliable Standard

If you have no standard by which to test against, you will not be able to determine truth from lies. Secret Service agents who are trained to identify counterfeit currency are not trained to know every conceivable counterfeit; they are trained to know the genuine currency and compare all others against it. Any bill deviant from the genuine is recognized as counterfeit. But if one doesn't know the standard, one is left uncertain when a counterfeit mimics the genuine too closely.

God's standard is His law, which is [Design Law](#) – the never-changing constants upon which the Creator built reality to operate. This law includes the physical laws of the universe, such as the laws of gravity, physics, and health, but it also includes the laws of love, liberty, worship, and many more.

Most children don't have the ability to understand the design principles for life, such as the second law of thermodynamics – the law of entropy that states if you don't put energy into a system, it decays. This is why they need a rule given to them to brush their teeth until they mature enough to embrace the law into their heart and freely brush their teeth because they want to be healthy – and health requires that we live in harmony with the laws of health, which are part of God's design laws.

Most spiritual children don't understand God's design laws, so our loving heavenly Father gave us a list of rules – the Ten Commandments – to help us in our immaturity. Unfortunately, some people don't realize that this list is merely a distillation of God's design law of love. That is why Jesus said that all law is contained in two commands: love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Love is one of God's design laws for life; it is the principle of giving, of other-centeredness.

If we really want to be able to differentiate truth from lies, we must first understand God's standard, which is the law of love, perfectly revealed and lived out in the life of Jesus.

If we substitute God's living law of love for a list of rules; if we teach that sin is rule-breaking rather than breaking God's design law for life; if we teach that sin is a legal problem requiring punishment rather than sin is the terminal condition of being out of harmony with God's design law for life – then we accept a false standard that warps our ability to discern truth from error.

If we accept the lie that God's law works like human law – imposed rules requiring imposed punishment – then when we see people using coercion and force to inflict pain and suffering on others, we may be deceived into believing that such behavior is okay as long as the cause is a just cause, such as opposing racism.

But when we understand design law, we understand that we cannot win God's cause using the methods of His enemy. We cannot eradicate hate with hate, evil with evil, violence with violence, fear with fear, darkness with darkness, lies with more lies. No! We can eradicate lies only with truth, fear only with

love, darkness only with light, evil only with real righteousness, hate only with forgiveness.

But to discern God's ways from the ways of the world, which at times seem so right, requires that we know God's design law, His character, and His methods. God is the standard, and God revealed Himself perfectly in Jesus. Thus, Jesus is the standard of righteousness, the standard of living for which we must strive.

The first principle in learning to discern is to study God's design laws, how they function, how they apply to life, and most important, understand how they were all lived out in the life of Jesus. Then, with God's design law as the standard, you can begin to compare ideas, actions, and movements to determine whether something is a genuine movement of God, which is being led and empowered by the Spirit of God, or is nothing more than an enticing counterfeit.

Look Past Words to Actions

Satan is the father of lies, and his war is a war over ideas, concepts, and beliefs; thus, it is important to differentiate lies from the truth. But sometimes the truth is not what we want to hear; sometimes the truth causes discomfort; sometimes the lie is more appealing than the truth; and therefore, sometimes people cling to winsome words, enticing claims, promising proclamations, deceptive declarations rather than looking past the lie to see the truth revealed in the actions. Many people fail to realize that actions often reveal the truth of a matter despite the words being proclaimed or how things are stated.

A con man will give words proclaiming his trustworthiness, his interest in helping you, yet his actions of stealing from you reveal the truth.

A man who beats his wife while telling her he only does it because he loves her reveals that his declarations of love are a lie. But sadly, far too many battered women have refused to see past the words and accept the truth the abuser's conduct reveals and thus stay in toxic relationships.

In the world today, many people are being deceived because they focus merely upon the words of a person. The promises proclaimed stir up powerful feelings that resonate with the heart's desire and people are deceived into believing the words and joining the cause; they don't examine the methods, principles, actions, and deeds and compare those with either the facts of the situation or God's design laws to determine what is actually true.

Are the actions taken promoting liberty or restricting liberty? The law of liberty is one of God's design laws, and righteousness seeks to promote the autonomy and liberty of others. Only in freedom does love grow; only in freedom do individuals develop and maximize their abilities; only in freedom is genuine health of the soul experienced.

The second principle in learning to discern is to examine what is happening beyond the words being proclaimed. Are people being given the freedom to express themselves, or are movements afoot that seek to silence dissenting voices, that seek to shut down outlets that present a differing view, that seek to cancel speakers or events that don't conform to their ideas, that seek to get people fired from their jobs for sharing their views - even when those views are shared maturely and without malice or derogatory remarks?

Rely on Truth, Not Emotions

Many are deceived because their emotions react strongly to an event, a circumstance, a speaker, a movement, or an idea. They feel passionately and act as those emotions direct. Such a method is almost always destructive.

Moreover, the method of acting on powerful feelings is heightened in group settings, where emotions are reinforced by others who feel the same anger, resentment, or sense of their righteousness. Strong emotions impair sound thinking. When we are overly emotional, the thinking regions of the brain are derailed and our ability to differentiate right from wrong is impaired. Such strong emotions are at the root of much domestic violence – and it is also what drives mobs.

This is the big difference between a violent mob and a peaceful protest. The peaceful protester is governed by reason; they have a logical, evidence-based complaint; they want to persuade, to convince, to change by rational discourse the current culture, beliefs, ideas, or methods. The great Reformer Martin Luther used this method when he hung his 95 Theses on the church door. And centuries later, his namesake, Martin Luther King Jr., used this same method in his persuasive books and speeches.

This stands in sharp contrast to violent mobs, who are not governed by reason and whose higher cortexes are not in control of their actions. Even if they have a righteous cause, having given up reason they become a mob – as the Bible describes, like brute beasts driven by their passion – and they end up doing harm to others and sowing more seeds of discord.

The third principle in learning to discern is that when outrageous events occur and you feel strong emotions, even righteously, don't let the emotions dethrone your reason. Be passionate, yes, but also be thoughtful; prayerfully ask God how you can seek to do justice, to change hearts and minds, using only His methods of love, truth and freedom. And I can promise you that, if you are led by the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth and love – your actions will always be reasonable, always be truth-based, always be expressions of love for others. Love will confront lies, hate, violence, and evil, but love never uses lies, hate, violence, and evil. Understanding God's design laws, one can differentiate movements led by God and counterfeits led by the enemy.

So think for yourself! Study and internalize into your being God's design laws for life; exercise your God-given abilities and reason to compare the various ideas, beliefs, movements, and causes with God's standard and come to your own conclusion. For we are at war, and I want you to be victorious in your own mind and heart – but victory is only experienced by internalizing and wielding the weapons of God: truth, love, and freedom.
