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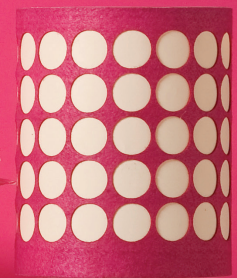
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discernment



Those who have met us know that we (Nancy and Mary) are almost as different as two friends can be. And those differences extend beyond our personalities and appearance into our interior decorating styles.

If we were to walk into a home décor store, Nancy would gravitate toward primary, winter colors—vibrant reds, blues, and greens. Mary would gravitate toward warm, bold, autumn tones—cinnamon, caramel, rust, chocolate, and teal. Nancy would like the floral patterns. Mary would like anything but. Nancy would be attracted to furniture that had light, clean, classic lines. Mary would be attracted to heavier, antique furniture with a funky modern twist. Nancy would be drawn toward serious and sophisticated accessories. Mary would be drawn toward quirky and artsy ones. One of the beautiful truths about women is that God created us all different.

The two of us have different styles. And your style is likely different from ours. There are so many to choose from: contemporary, country, Victorian, Federal, St. Louis, Nordic, modern, French provincial, retro, eclectic. What's more, these styles can be combined with an endless variety of patterns, colors, textures, and accessories. As a result, our homes don't look exactly the same. They're all different.

But although styles differ, there are certain elements that all good designs have in common. Designers choose and arrange flooring, wall treatments, lighting, window treatments, furniture, and accessories according to their color, texture, line, form, and space. These are the critical elements of every design.¹

*A True Woman
is characterized
by right thinking
... She knows
“what accords
with sound
doctrine.”*



This Bible study is about the critical design elements of womanhood. As we explained in the introduction, it's based on the passage in Titus chapter 2, where Paul outlines what the women in Titus' congregation needed to learn.

The first critical element of womanhood evident in the passage is discernment. A True Woman is characterized by right thinking . . . She knows "what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

"Wait a minute!" you may object; "isn't discernment something guys need too?" Absolutely. In this chapter Paul gives instruction tailored to several different groups of people in the church. In verse 2, he lists some things older men need to learn. In verses 3 to 5, he lays out the curriculum for older and younger women. In verse 6, he talks about the curriculum for young men. All these groups need to learn "what accords with sound doctrine." Obviously, both sexes need discernment. Men and women, young and old—all need to know sound doctrine.

But here's the thing. Though there's overlap, Paul's lists in Titus 2 suggest there's a different emphasis needed for each gender, in terms of how they apply and live out sound doctrine. Some traits are especially important to what it means to be a man, and some are particularly important to what it means to be a woman.

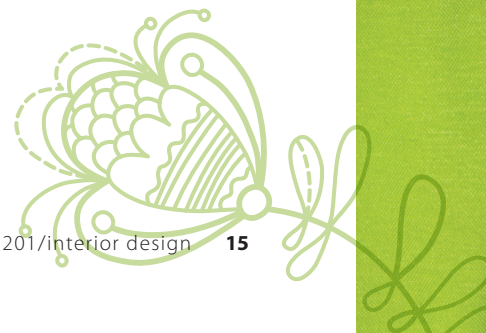
Paul gives certain traits a gender-specific emphasis. But that doesn't imply that they're *gender-exclusive*. For example, Paul instructs *women* not be slanderers; he exhorts *men* to be sound in faith. Obviously, that doesn't mean that men don't need to learn to control their mouths, or that women don't ever wrestle with doubt or doctrinal error.

Women are instructed to be reverent, to love their spouses and children, to exercise self-control, to be pure and kind, to be devoted to their homes, and to submit to God-ordained authority. Yet men arguably need to learn these things too! Men are instructed to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Yet women need to learn these things too!

So why the sex-specific lists? Why not just lump everything together under one big category of "Important Stuff for Christians to Learn"?

The reason for the differing lists is that men and women are different. As we learned in *True Woman 101*, Paul's lists counteract our sex-specific sin tendencies and point us back to our divine design. So although "discernment" is important for both men and women, there are specific applications of "sound doctrine" that are particularly directed to and important for each gender to understand.

According to Paul, right thinking leads to right living. If what you think about womanhood isn't shaped by sound doctrine, chances are, you're not going to live in a way that pleases the Lord. Discernment, grounded in a clear understanding of God's Word, is the first critical element of true womanhood. →





“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Titus 1:9

“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”

Titus 2:1

“... in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

Titus 2:7-8 NKJV

“... so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Titus 2:10

Not long ago, a nurse working at a hospital experienced a series of asthma attacks that flared up whenever she worked on the bone marrow transplant unit. Another nurse and nurse’s aide also started to have chest tightness and wheezing, itchy eyes, and constant runny noses. All three complained to their supervisor about a dank, musty smell that seemed to emanate from the ward, but their complaints fell on deaf ears.

It wasn’t until a six-year-old patient on the unit developed a fever and pneumonia and suddenly died, and an autopsy revealed that her lungs were filled with a fungus typically found in decaying organic matter, that management took the employees seriously. All of a sudden, their claim that the building was making them sick didn’t sound so far-fetched.

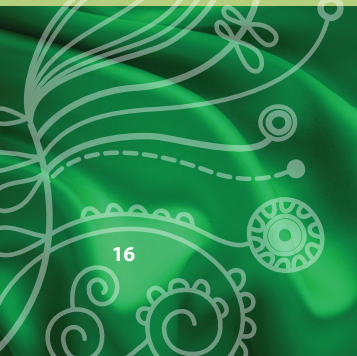


Sure enough, an environmental investigation found that the air filters on the bone marrow transplant unit were clogged with a thick, greenish-black mold. The contaminants in the air were responsible for the employee sicknesses and the little girl’s death. To deal with the problem, the hospital had to rip out its heating and air-conditioning system and renovate the entire bone marrow transplant unit.²

Some experts suggest that the lack of ventilation in newer buildings, combined with increased use of mold-friendly building materials, allows for severe mold infestations. The contaminated air results in “sick buildings,” where large numbers of employees begin to experience similar health symptoms.

The apostle Paul wanted to make sure that the churches on the island of Crete provided a spiritually healthy environment for fledgling new believers. He wanted to make sure they were breathing spiritually healthy air.

Read Titus 2:1. What did Paul want Titus to be careful to teach?



Doctrine is a major theme in the book of Titus. Circle the word *doctrine* in each verse in the margin on the previous page.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *doctrine*? How would you define it?

For some, the word *doctrine* undoubtedly conjures up images of old, coke-bottle-lensed theology professors using long, unfamiliar words and droning on and on in unintelligible languages. Perhaps the mere mention of the word makes you want to stifle a yawn, or bolt for the nearest exit.

It's important to understand that doctrine isn't something reserved for the theological elite. The word simply means "teachings." A doctrine is a set of beliefs. And everyone has one.

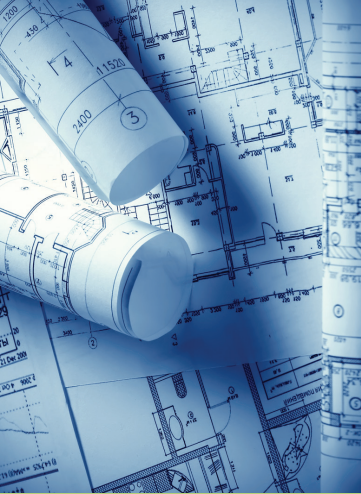
Atheists have a doctrine. For example, the famous evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins believes the Bible should not be taught as reality. "It is fiction, myth, poetry, anything but reality."³ That is his doctrine.

Oprah Winfrey used her multi-award-winning talk show to teach her doctrine of self-improvement, church-free spirituality, and guilt-free sexuality to millions of women each day.

In the space below, list some doctrines (teachings) about womanhood that are commonly expressed in popular media and contemporary culture:

The teaching you believe determines the way you live. Paul knew that believers in Crete would undoubtedly have and follow a doctrine. But he was concerned about what *kind* of doctrine they were going to teach, believe, and practice. Not any kind of doctrine would do. Paul was concerned that their doctrine would be "sound."





sound doctrine

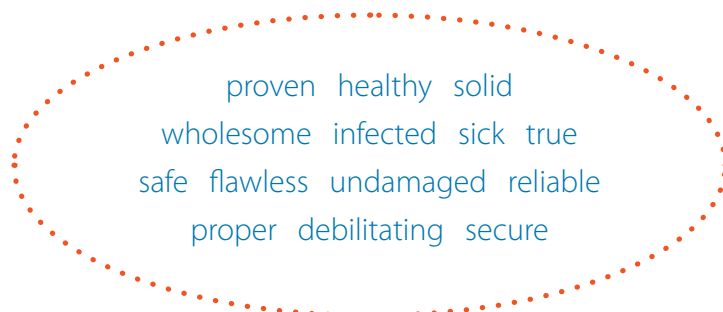
Like the word *doctrine*, the word *sound* is also a recurring theme in the book of Titus. *Sound* essentially means “healthy.” The Greek word for *sound*—*hugaiainō*—is closely related to our English word *hygiene*. Sound doctrine is doctrine that is free from contamination. It’s pure and wholesome. It is that which makes sick people well.

Our culture is obsessed with physical health and soundness. It advises us to avoid junk food, read labels, shop in whole-food stores, and pay more for organic foods. As a result, many people watch what they eat. But sadly, most are utterly unconcerned about their spiritual consumption. They are unaware that they are ingesting a lot of contaminated, unhealthy ideas.

Sound doctrine is healthy. It’s pure, uncontaminated, and free from error. It’s like breathing in clean, fresh air. Unsound doctrine is a mixture of truth and error. It’s like breathing in air that’s tainted with a dangerous contaminant. You may not smell or notice the toxin, but it’s inevitable that it will negatively impact your health. Unsound doctrine leads to spiritually sick and weak believers, which leads to spiritually unhealthy churches.

In the verses in the margin, put a box around the word *sound*.

In the word cloud, cross out the three words that are antonyms (opposite meaning) of the word *sound*:



Why do you think Paul was concerned that the women in Crete know and believe sound doctrine?

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Titus 1:9

“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”

Titus 2:1

“... in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

Titus 2:7–8 NKJV

“... so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Titus 2:10



Do you know what your doctrine is? Do you care? Have you evaluated the doctrine of your favorite TV shows? Of the books and magazines you read? Have you evaluated what you're being taught about womanhood? Because every time you hear or see an advertisement, or watch a TV/computer/movie screen, or listen to the lyrics of a song, or read an article or book, or listen to your girlfriends chatter about their exploits, or catch up on the latest happenings on your Facebook or other social network, you are breathing in doctrine. And it's important to consider whether that doctrine is sound.

Check any statements below that are true of you:

- The teaching about womanhood I breathe in is generally sound.
- The teaching about womanhood I breathe in is generally unsound.
- I'm not sure if the teaching about womanhood I breathe in is sound.
- I don't think the unsound teaching in my environment affects me.
- I have strong filters in place so as to minimize the unsound teaching.
- I'm not convinced that my doctrine about womanhood matters.

Explain why you chose those particular statements:



In Titus 2, Paul outlines the Lord's expert design for womanhood. The basis for that design is sound doctrine. Sound doctrine is healthy, wholesome, and beneficial. Do you believe that? Do you

believe that the Lord's design for women is not only right, but also beautiful and desirable? Do you believe that the instructions He gives you are truly "for your good" (see Deut. 10:12–13)?

→ **Close today's lesson in prayer, asking the Lord to help you learn about and embrace His expert design.**



“WHAT DOES THE LORD YOUR GOD REQUIRE OF YOU, BUT TO FEAR THE LORD YOUR GOD, TO WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS, TO LOVE HIM, TO SERVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND TO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS AND STATUTES OF THE LORD, WHICH I AM COMMANDING YOU TODAY FOR YOUR GOOD?”

Deuteronomy 10:12–13





“Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to build up the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness . . .”

Titus 1:1 HCSB

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Titus 1:9

M

“Make sure to snap a line!” my (Mary’s) handyman dad always reminds me when I embark on a decorating project. An accurate guideline is necessary to get the pieces set in the right place. Without one, the wallpaper, tiles, flooring, pictures, or moldings might not line up properly, and the decorating project may turn into a disaster.

Two tools are essential necessities for the decorating enthusiast: a plumb bob and a level. These tools ensure that a guideline is perfectly vertical or horizontal relative to the earth’s true horizon.

You’ve probably seen a level (sometimes called a “spirit level” or a “bubble level”). It looks like a thick, metal ruler with embedded glass vials. The vials are incompletely filled with a colored spirit (alcohol), leaving a large bubble visible inside. The bubble moves with the angle of the ruler and indicates whether an object is “level”—that is, whether it is exactly *horizontal*, or true. To get a perfectly horizontal line, the decorator has to tilt the tool until the bubble is situated perfectly between the markings on the middle of the vial.

A plumb bob is a simple brass or metal weight with a point on one end. The bob is attached to a string (the plumb line), which is often coated in colored chalk. This tool uses the law of gravity to establish what is “plumb”—that is, what is exactly *vertical*, or true.

You can use a plumb bob to line up wallpaper, wall décor, or art, or to locate fixtures or decorations in relation to an object or surface above or below. You simply hold the end of the string near the ceiling and let the plumb bob hang free. When it stops swaying, the string is perfectly vertical. Depending on your project, you can then mark the top and bottom points, or snap the line to leave a chalk mark on a wall.

On one occasion, I tried to hang wallpaper without following my dad’s advice. The walls looked straight to me, so I started papering in the corner. I didn’t bother to check if the adjacent wall was plumb, and I didn’t take the time to snap a line.





The first piece of wallpaper looked just fine. But I had to raise and tilt the second piece to get the edge and pattern to match. After that, each piece looked more crooked than the last. By the time I got to the middle of the wall, it was painfully obvious that the wall I had used as my starting line was slanted, and that things were going extremely wrong. The pattern

was running uphill, and the bottom of the paper was getting farther and farther away from the floor. It was a disaster! I had to rip it all down and start over . . . Needless to say, I was careful to snap a line the second time around!

Paul knew that the ideas being promoted by some of the Cretan believers were a bit off. He wanted Titus to “snap a line” and put things in order by ensuring the lives and doctrine of the believers lined up plumb, level, and true with God’s standard.

Read Titus 1:1–9 in your Bible. What do verses 1 to 4 point to as the standard for truth?

What would happen if the women in Crete increased in their knowledge of the truth (see verse 1)? Check all that apply:

- They’d all turn into mindless puppets.
- They’d demonstrate that Christian women are intelligent.
- Their increased knowledge would lead to increased godliness.
- Their right thinking would lead to right behavior.

What do you think it means to “hold firm to the trustworthy word” (v. 9)?



a plumb line

Scholars think that Paul wrote his pastoral letters of Titus and 1 Timothy shortly after being released from Roman imprisonment. Nero was the emperor on the throne (AD 54–68). Animosity against Christians was on the rise, and things were about to get a lot worse. The Roman government would soon take an official stand against Christianity. Paul would be imprisoned again, and eventually would be beheaded.

We don't know for sure if Paul yet sensed that his life and ministry were nearing an end. But these letters appear to have a sense of urgency about them. In light of the looming persecution, it was critical that the churches were strong and healthy and that they had solid, established, mature leaders. In his letter to Titus, just as in his first letter to Timothy, Paul warned against false teachers and issued instructions to various groups regarding proper Christian behavior. Paul wanted the churches to be "sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13) and to use the right plumb line to determine which ideas didn't line up with sound doctrine.



"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

John 17:17

In Titus 1:1–9 we learn that mature believers:

- Have a saving faith in the gospel of Christ Jesus
- Uphold the Bible as the standard for truth
- Regard the Word of God as trustworthy
- Honor the teachings of Christ and the apostles
- Know what accords with sound doctrine
- Are able to discern truth from error
- Exhibit godliness of character and godly relationships

Paul hoped that the men and women in Crete would hold firm to the trustworthy teachings of the faith. He anticipated that those who embraced sound doctrine would also be sound in faith, sound in love, sound in steadfastness, sound in speech, and sound in all sorts of other things too (1:13; 2:1, 2, 8).

A deeper knowledge of truth leads to deeper godliness. Healthy beliefs lead to healthy behavior. Right thinking, empowered by the Holy Spirit, leads to right living.

Read John 17:17 in the margin. How is truth instrumental in sanctifying us (making us more holy)?

Can you identify an instance in your life when unsound thinking resulted in unsound, unhealthy behavior?

Can you identify an instance in your life when the Word of God changed your thinking, and this resulted in sound, healthy behavior?



➔ **Close today's lesson in prayer.**

Ask the Lord to show you if there are any areas in your thinking or lifestyle that are not "plumb," according to His Word.





“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:8–10

“The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way.”

Proverbs 14:8

“It is the duty of every Christian to think biblically about all areas of life so that they might act biblically in all areas of life.”⁴

Tim Challies

In yesterday’s lesson we learned that what we believe about the gospel and about the Bible is critically important.

According to Paul, the Word of God provides a plumb line. It establishes that there’s a right way and a wrong way for Christians to think and behave. Some of its instructions are gender specific, so it also provides a plumb line for womanhood. There’s a right way and a wrong way for us to think and behave *as women* . . . and the Word of God helps us discern the difference.

Read Ephesians 5:8–10 in the margin. Why do we need *discernment* in order to know what pleases the Lord?

Discernment is the design element of womanhood that we’re studying this week: A True Woman is characterized by right thinking . . . She is not swayed by every “wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14) that comes along. She has a heart for solid biblical teaching and has a growing knowledge of God’s Word. She knows how to evaluate what she hears to see if it measures up to Scripture. And she knows how to live her life in a way that “accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

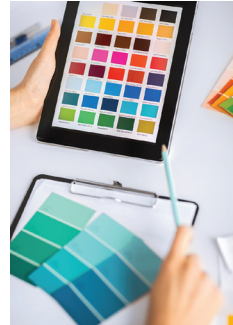


The word “accords” (Greek: *prepō*) used here is significant. It means fitting, suitable, proper. A godly woman can sift through a multitude of options and identify which ones are proper—which “fit”—with sound doctrine. She can determine which choices suitably honor the Lord and figure out which one is best, given her particular circumstance.

Should you pursue higher education? Should you embark on a career? Should you marry George, or Frank, or forgo marriage altogether? How much should you work outside the home? Should you use birth control or family planning? Should you aim to have two kids or twenty-two? Should



you send your kids to public school? Private school? Or homeschool? Should you lead a Bible study or sing on the worship team? Should you spend your money on a trip to Disneyland or give it to rescue girls from the sex trade? Is it your responsibility to cook all the meals and his to cut the grass? Should you trade in all your pencil skirts for ankle dusters? Should you be listening to that band or going to that movie? For these and millions of other big and small questions, the Bible simply doesn't say.



Identify a current or past situation in which you weighed several options, and tried to discern what was “pleasing to the Lord.”

Over the course of your lifetime you will be faced with a multitude of choices—some inconsequential, some good, some bad, some right, some wrong, some better, some best. That’s why you need discernment. That’s why you need the ongoing help of the Holy Spirit. That’s why you need to wrestle with how to apply the Bible’s precepts to your life.

You can’t rely on a prescribed formula, or base your decisions on what your girlfriends are doing or on the standards set by our culture. You have a personal responsibility to figure things out. The Bible gives us guiding principles, but it doesn’t specify exactly how to apply those principles. That’s why each of us needs to *try to discern* how we can best please the Lord.

In the space below, write out a definition for the word *discern*.

If you peeked at a dictionary to help, you may have discovered that the English word, *discern*, comes from the French *discerner*, which means to distinguish or separate. It’s based on the Latin *discernere*: *dis* (off, away) + *cernere* (distinguish, separate).





“So that you may approve [discern] what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

Philippians 1:10

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind . . . that I may discern between good and evil.”

1 Kings 3:9

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

1 Corinthians 2:14

The concepts of *distinguishing* and *separating* are inherent in the Word. Discernment involves distinguishing the difference between two things and separating one from the other.

Spiritual discernment involves using God’s Word as the standard for distinguishing and separating ideas and behaviors. It distinguishes and separates truth from falsehood, darkness from light, healthy from unhealthy, sound from unsound, and good from evil, based on the Bible’s plumb line.

Author Tim Challies provides a helpful definition of spiritual discernment:

*Discernment is the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.*⁵

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14 in the margin. Then, mark each statement below as true (T) or false (F).

- _____ Spirit-filled women will discern things differently from women who walk according to the flesh.
- _____ Any woman—regardless of whether or not she is a true believer—who reads the Bible has the ability to discern what pleases the Lord.
- _____ There are many women who don’t understand the Bible’s precepts about womanhood and consider them foolish.
- _____ Women who are spiritually discerning have a heightened ability to see and understand issues from God’s perspective.

off color

A skilled decorator is discerning. She has an eye for what matches the décor of a room. She pays attention to the subtleties between various tints and shades. She knows when a particular color is “off” and doesn’t fit with the design. She discerns differences that others may not notice or may shrug off as inconsequential. Spiritual discernment is much the same.



Members of the congregation at Crete were being deceived by teachers who were pushing doctrine that was politically correct, but theologically wrong (Titus 1:10). The reason they were fooled was that they didn't discern the subtleties between concepts that were true, and concepts that were only partially true. Falsehood often contains enough truth to mislead those who lack discernment. The idea is just slightly "off." If it were blatantly and utterly false, people wouldn't be taken in by it.

I (Mary) was in high school in the late-1970s, during the peak of the feminist movement. I remember asking my spiritual mentor, Diane, what she thought about women's lib. Diane, who was in her early twenties, was the adult sponsor of the Christian club I helped co-lead. Diane was a "go-getter" — extremely gifted, capable, and intelligent. I expected that she would enthusiastically support a movement that pushed for the equality of women.

When I asked for her opinion, she thoughtfully paused, and then said something like this: "Well . . . I can't say I know much about it, but from what I've heard, something seems 'off.' While I sympathize with many of the concerns, the clamoring for personal rights and the inciting of anger just doesn't sit right with me. It doesn't jibe with the character of Jesus."

Diane's words of discernment proved helpful for me over the following years as I completed a professional degree and embarked on a career in an educational and work culture that pushed feminist ideology. The red flag that Diane raised caused me to be cautious, and to pray for discernment about all the new and seemingly promising ideas that many were so quick to embrace.

In your own words, rewrite Challies' definition of spiritual discernment:

Read the verses in the margin on page 26. Summarize why it's important for you to be discerning about the opinions and ideas that come your way:

➔ **Close today's lesson** by personalizing Solomon's prayer from 1 Kings 3:9. Ask the Lord to help you become a more spiritually discerning woman.





“For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers . . . They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.”

Titus 1:10, 16

The fog was particularly thick as I (Nancy) drove to the *Revive Our Hearts* studio one morning. It was terribly difficult to see. People had clicked on their headlights, and everyone drove extremely slowly and carefully. Traffic crawled along at a snail’s pace. In all that fog, I had to be careful to watch for the right turnoff. It took a lot more effort than normal to discern the difference between the right and the wrong turn, to avoid running into a car or pedestrian, and to stay on the road and avoid ending up in the ditch.

There’s a lot of spiritual “fog” out there these days . . . and not only in the world, but also in the church. There are all sorts of persuasive voices offering ideas about what we should believe and how we should live. And this is particularly the case with regard to “bibli-



cal womanhood.” It can get quite confusing. Even disorienting.

The situation is not unlike the one facing the believers on Crete. They also had dissenting voices in the church telling them what they should believe.

Read Titus 1:10–16 in your Bible. List the traits and characteristics of the people pushing false ideas in the Cretan churches:





Crete is the largest of the Greek islands and is fifth largest in the Mediterranean. It lies at the junction of four seas: the Ionian, Aegean, Mediterranean, and Libyan. Its location put it at the center of the development of world culture and civilization. Crete was famous in Greek mythology as the birthplace of Zeus, and for the legends of King Minos, Theseus, and the Minotaur. It was the hub for the Minoans, Europe's first advanced civilization.

In approximately 67 BC, Crete was conquered by the Romans, who built luxurious Roman buildings, temples, stadiums, and baths on the island. By then, the Cretan population numbered about 300,000. Though most inhabitants were Greek, the cities also housed significant Jewish communities. Jews from Crete were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11).

Cretans were famed as daring sailors, prosperous traders, and fierce warriors. But they were also notorious for their character flaws. The Roman historian Titus Livius spoke of Cretan "avarice" (greed). The Greek historian Polybius wrote of their "ferocity and fraud" and "their mendacity"—which is the propensity to fabricate stories or bend the truth.

Another Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, noted that Cretans tended to be stubborn and insubordinate. They were intent on doing things their own way. Paul quoted Epimenides, a Cretan poet/prophet, as saying "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12). Things were so bad that in the ancient world the word "cretanize" was proverbial for telling a lie.

Paul was concerned because Cretan *mendacity* had spilled over into the Christian community. To accommodate Crete's Greek mythological culture, certain teachers were pushing elaborate myths in an attempt to make the Hebrew Scriptures more palatable for a better sell. They adopted new, speculative, and fanciful biblical interpretations, possibly based on Old Testament genealogies. Instead of adhering to the teachings and traditions passed down by the apostles, these upstart theologians promoted "cleverly devised myths" (2 Peter 1:16) that undoubtedly appealed to their first-century listeners' sense of political correctness.



"Most people—even Christians—have unthinkingly exposed themselves to so much deception that they do not even realize they are being deceived."⁶

Nancy



This problem was not limited to the church in Crete. Paul addresses similar issues in his letters to Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus.

Read the verses in the margin. What do you think Paul meant when he said these teachers “promote empty speculations rather than God’s plan”?

“[Nor] to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God’s plan, which operates by faith. . . . Some have deviated from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. They want to be teachers . . . although they don’t understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.”

1 Timothy 1:4–7 HCSB

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.”

1 Timothy 4:7

“Guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge.’”

1 Timothy 6:20

False teachers in the early church promoted new ideas that distracted people from pursuing godliness and got them caught up in controversial, speculative arguments (1 Tim. 1:4, 6; 4:7; 6:4, 20; Titus 1:10; 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23).

Instead of encouraging believers to guard and cherish the deposit of truth they had received and to work at applying the Word, they fostered an attitude of irreverence toward Scripture and the apostles’ teaching (1 Tim. 4:7).

The teachers tantalized believers with novel, progressive interpretations, which they confidently promoted as “knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20). Their ideas were persuasive, yet subtly deceptive. These teachers confused rather than clarified the issues (1 Tim. 4:1–3; Titus 1:10–13; 2 Tim. 3). What’s more, they advocated loose moral standards (1 Tim. 1:19, 20; Titus 1:15, 16; 2 Tim. 2:16, 19; 3:1–5). In essence, they encouraged believers to value and trust their own opinions more than they valued and trusted God’s (2 Tim. 3:4).

Use the paragraphs above to make a list of the “red flags” (warning signs) that should have alerted the people in Crete that the teachings might be false:

weak women

W We can’t be sure of the exact content of the false teaching, but it’s clear that it was devoid of any true spiritual value and that it only led to further speculation, questions, controversy, and arguments. It’s also clear that some women of that day were particularly susceptible to being deceived by it.





According to 2 Timothy 3:7, why do you think the women were taken captive by false teaching? Put a check [✓] next to the statement(s) that apply:

- They were too feeble to stand against popular opinion.
- They weren't educated and hadn't studied the issues enough.
- The false teaching appealed to them because it validated their sinful tendencies and desires.
- Deep down, they didn't really want to change their behavior and turn from their sin.

Read 2 Timothy 4:3. Explain why and how Christian women in our day might reject sound teaching about womanhood:

The women mentioned in 2 Timothy 3 were always learning. The reason they were taken captive by false teaching—and were unable to “arrive at knowledge of the truth”—wasn't due to a lack of information. It was due to a lack of holy desires. You see, right thinking and right living go hand in hand. If you are unprepared to live the way God wants you to, chances are, you'll reject sound teaching and will simply gravitate toward teachers who will tell you what you want to hear.

➔ **Close today's lesson in prayer.** Ask the Lord to give you the mind to discern sound doctrine and the heart to obey it.



“FOR AMONG THEM ARE THOSE WHO CREEP INTO HOUSEHOLDS AND CAPTURE WEAK WOMEN, BURDENED WITH SINS AND LED ASTRAY BY VARIOUS PASSIONS, ALWAYS LEARNING AND NEVER ABLE TO ARRIVE AT A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.”

2 Timothy 3:6–7

“FOR THE TIME IS COMING WHEN PEOPLE WILL NOT ENDURE SOUND TEACHING, BUT HAVING ITCHING EARS THEY WILL ACCUMULATE FOR THEMSELVES TEACHERS TO SUIT THEIR OWN PASSIONS.”

2 Timothy 4:3



“Teach me, O LORD,
the way of your
statutes; and I will
keep it to the end.
Give me understanding
[discernment], that
I may keep your law
and observe it with
my whole heart.”

Psalms 119:33–34



In 2005, United States Secret Service agents began encountering a run of counterfeit bills unlike anything they had seen before. Except for identical serial numbers and tiny imperfections that casual observers were unlikely to notice, the cash almost looked and felt genuine. The funny money turned up everywhere from up-scale retailers to fast food stores in every state in the nation, and in nine foreign countries.

Despite the Secret Service’s best efforts, the forger of these notes evaded capture for more than three years. By then, Albert Edward Talton, of Lawndale, California, had put more than \$7 million in phony currency into circulation. And he’d made much of it using a computer, basic ink-jet printers, and supplies purchased from his local Staples.



Counterfeiting is considered such a threat to the fabric of the country that it is—along with treason—one of only two criminal offenses named in the US Constitution. According to the Secret Service, the best defense against it is to educate and train the public to discern the difference between genuine and fake currency. It encourages everyone to “Know Your Money!”

“Knowing their money” is the process whereby the FBI trains its agents to spot counterfeits. Agents spend countless hours handling, examining, and intensely studying authentic currency. They are so familiar with the real thing that when a counterfeit is presented, its flaws are obvious to them. They can immediately tell that the texture, feel, and look aren’t quite right.

False doctrine poses as serious a threat to the church as false money does to the economy. Paul wanted the believers in Crete to be so familiar with sound doctrine that they’d immediately discern if something was off. He wanted their thinking and lifestyles to display the pure, untainted truth of the gospel.

Read Psalm 119:9–16 in your Bible. According to the psalmist, how can we keep our thoughts and actions pure (healthy/sound)?

Discernment is the skill of understanding and applying the Word of God, with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong. Familiarity with sound doctrine is what helped Diane (Mary’s high school mentor) discern that certain elements of feminist doctrine were wrong. Diane was able to spot the falsehood because she had spent time handling the real thing. She knew her Bible!

According to Hebrews 5:14, how does a believer get better at the skill of spiritual discernment?

What do you think this “constant practice” involves?

I (Nancy) studied piano for years. Weekly lessons and daily practice were a regular part of the rhythm of life. While many of my peers were out socializing or having “fun” after classes and on weekends, I spent countless hours sequestered in a practice room, working on scales, arpeggios, and other technical exercises, playing through the same classical pieces over and over and over again, until they were mastered. There were no shortcuts or substitutes for “constant practice” if I wanted to become an accomplished pianist.

And there are no shortcuts or substitutes for “constant practice” when it comes to developing spiritual discernment—while others are whiling away their time with trivial pursuits, a woman who wants to be spiritually mature will devote herself to reading and mediating on God’s Word and putting it into practice in her life. As we spend time in His presence, our minds are renewed, and we grow in our ability to discern truth from error, right from wrong.

“BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE, FOR THOSE WHO HAVE THEIR POWERS OF DISCERNMENT TRAINED BY CONSTANT PRACTICE TO DISTINGUISH GOOD FROM EVIL.”

Hebrews 5:14

Deception was—and still is—crucial to Satan’s strategy.”⁸





Why is it important that you grow in discernment? Match each reason to the verse in which the idea occurs. Write an [H] in the blank for Hebrews 5:14 (on previous page), an [E] for Ephesians 4:14, and a [P] for Philippians 1:10:

- _____ So you won't be tossed around by the latest new idea
- _____ So you can figure out what the best choice is
- _____ So you won't be fooled by clever but misguided people
- _____ So you will get better at telling the difference between good and evil
- _____ So you may be pure and blameless
- _____ So you may grow up and mature spiritually

“So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Ephesians 4:14

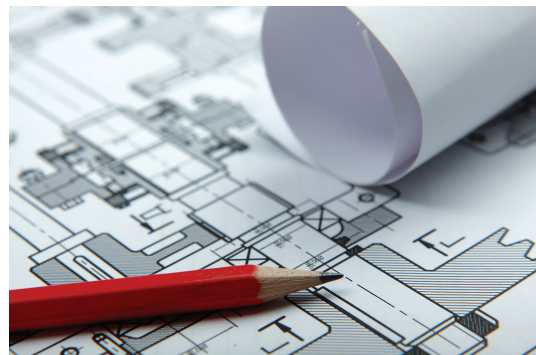
“So that you may approve [discern] what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

Philippians 1:10

It's important that you strive to grow in discernment. Women who are discerning have the ability to see and understand issues from God's perspective. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they strive for and are given an understanding of what pleases God and what doesn't. They do this by understanding God through his Word, and by applying the wisdom of sound doctrine to their lives.

practice it

In his book *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, Tim Challies points out that “discernment is a skill. It's not an inherent ability like breathing or chewing but a skill”—like playing an instrument—“that must be practiced and improved. There's not a person on earth who has been born with a full measure of discernment, or who has all of the discernment he will ever need. There's not a person who has attained a level of expertise that allows him to move on and to leave discernment behind. Like the master musician who practices his skills more as his acclaim grows, a discerning person will see with ever-greater clarity his need to increase in discernment. He will want to sharpen and improve this skill throughout his life.”⁹





In the verses in the margin, circle the words *test* and *testing*.

The dictionary defines test as the means by which the quality or genuineness of something is determined. The Lord wants us to test

the things we see and hear and not mindlessly accept them. He wants us to hold them up to the standard of Scripture and discern whether they line up with God's plumb line.

Every day you receive messages about how you should live—ideas about gender, relationships, love, marriage, morality, children, work, finances, possessions, leisure, attitudes, emotions, habits, and a host of other things that impact you as a woman. The ideas come from popular media, books, social networks, relatives, friends, and colleagues . . . and also from teachers and leaders in the church.

Are you testing those ideas? Are you familiar enough with Scripture to know what accords with sound doctrine? And to perceive when something is not quite right? A True Woman is characterized by right thinking. She applies herself to become a woman of discernment.

→ **In the space below**, write out Romans 12:2 as a prayer, personalizing it. Ask the Lord to help you become a woman who is grounded in the Word of God and who is able to discern His will.

**“TEST EVERYTHING;
HOLD FAST WHAT
IS GOOD. ABSTAIN
FROM EVERY FORM
OF EVIL.”**

**1 Thessalonians
5:21–22**

**“DO NOT BE
CONFORMED TO
THIS WORLD, BUT
BE TRANSFORMED
BY THE RENEWAL
OF YOUR MIND,
THAT BY TESTING
YOU MAY DISCERN
WHAT IS THE WILL
OF GOD, WHAT
IS GOOD AND
ACCEPTABLE AND
PERFECT.”**

Romans 12:2



drawing it out,
drawing it in...



interior renovation

process

The video for Week One will help you process this week's lessons. You'll find this week's video, the leader's guide, and additional resources at TrueWoman201.com.

ponder

Think about the following questions. Discuss them with your friends, family, and/or small group:

1. Why is it so important for us to have sound doctrine?
2. Describe some characteristics of false teachers. How can we distinguish between true teaching and false?
3. Identify some beliefs or patterns of thinking in our culture that breed spiritual contamination. How can we guard ourselves against breathing in these spiritual toxins?
4. False teachers in Paul's day encouraged believers to value and trust their own opinions more than they valued and trusted God. How do you see that happening today when it comes to ideas about womanhood?
5. What is your "plumb line" for making decisions in those gray areas of life, situations for which Scripture doesn't provide a black-and-white answer?
6. What is involved in practicing spiritual discernment? Why is spiritual discernment vital to glorifying God with our lives?
7. What characteristics do you see in the women described in 2 Timothy 3:6-7? What made them weak, and how can we safeguard against living like they did?
8. How can you develop greater discernment in your home, your relationships, and in other areas of your life?

