**Discernment, How to get it**

*Various passages; I Thes 5:20-21*

**Context**

One could argue that the greatest problem facing the church today is a lack of discernment. The absence of discernment leads to poor choices and accepting the wrong things—i.e. bad theology, wrong teaching, unwise in who they follow, listen to and read. As Christians, we must be precise in our thinking and judicial in our understanding. We must discriminate on what we hear, believe, and live.

We must understand what is right and what is wrong; we must compare the pretender to the genuine in everything in life—especially regarding our faith. The central way to do that successfully is through: a zeal for God’s word, a knowledge of the Scriptures, and a will to stand apart and against false dogmas, which pass for doctrines in the world.

Without God’s Word to guide us we will make bad decisions, have faulty reasoning, possess a superficial understanding, shallow knowledge, and be ignorant to the schemes of the devil. A lack of discernment in the church has contributed more anguish than all the persecutions through the entire history of the church.

A persecuted church is generally a strong church; a comfortable church can quickly and easily abandon the truth (**Revelation 2-3**).

**1 Timothy 3:15**—…*but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*

In life, there is truth and there is error.

1. God is absolute truth. There is no falsehood in Him. He cannot lie.

**Titus 1:2**—…*in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,*

**Numbers 23:19**—*God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

**Romans 3:4a**—…*Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar…*

1. Satan is nothing but a liar. He is the father of lies.

**John 8:44**—*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

1. Scripture repeatedly warns us of:
   1. Ear-tickling teachers (**2 Timothy 4:2**)
   2. Teachers in accordance to their own desires (**2 Timothy 4:3**)
   3. Feel-good messages (**Micah 3:5-12; Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11**)
   4. Deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (**1 Timothy 4:1**)
   5. Destructive heresies (**2 Peter 2:2**)
   6. Destructive lies (**John 8:44**)
   7. Worldly fables (**2 Timothy 4:7**)
   8. Commandments of men rather than God (**Mark 7:7-9; Matthew 15:9**)
   9. Speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God (**2 Corinthians 10:5**)
   10. False knowledge (**1 Timothy 4:13, 16; 1 Timothy 6:20**)
   11. Delude you with persuasive argument (**Colossians 2:4)**
   12. Philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men (**Colossians 2:8**)
   13. For we are not like many, peddling the word of God (**2 Corinthians 2:17**)
   14. False prophets, wolves in sheep’s clothing (**Matthew 7:15**)

**Principles from God’s Word**

1. **The Illustration** 
   * 1. The religious authorities

**Matthew 16:1-4**—*The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.****2****But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’****3****And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?****4****An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away.*

1. They could discern lesser things better than they could spiritual matters
2. Case in point: the promised Messiah was in their midst

**Point:** Their primitive way of telling the weather was better than their spiritual discernment

* + 1. The Corinthian church

**2 Corinthians 11:1-6**—*I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.****2****For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.****3****But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.****4****For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.****5****For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.****6****But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.*

* + - 1. Paul’s relationship with the church
      2. As dear as a husband to his wife
      3. Desire to present her pure—holy jealousy
      4. Concern about her being led astray

1. **The need**

**1 Thessalonians 5:14-22**—*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.****15****See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.****16****Rejoice always;****17****pray without ceasing;****18****in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.****19****Do not quench the Spirit;****20****do not despise prophetic utterances.****21****But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;****22****abstain from every form of evil.*

1. Summary passage
   1. Admonish
   2. Encourage
   3. Be patient
   4. Don’t repay evil for evil
   5. Seek for the good
   6. Rejoice always
   7. Pray without ceasing
   8. In everything, give thanks
   9. Don’t quench the Spirit
   10. Don’t despise preaching
   11. Examine everything
   12. Hold fast to the good
   13. Obtain from evil
2. Focus on **vv20-22** – God calls us to discernment
   1. *Do not despise* (**v20**)—downgrade; do not make light of, do not belittle, do not treat as trivial or as insignificant
   2. *Prophecies (prophēteias*)—the gift of interpreting the diving will; the gift of interpreting divine purpose; the skill of publicly proclaiming God’s Word
   3. We are not to treat lightly or trivialize the public proclamation of God’s truth
   4. At the same time, examine everything carefully (**v21**)
   5. *Examine* (*dokimazō*)—used often regarding something that is tested; something that is examined to reveal its genuineness; subject to scrutiny and analysis

**Acts 17:10-12**—*The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.****11****Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.****12****Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.*

* 1. Whatever then is identified as evil, reject it in any form
  2. *Abstain*—push it away from you; make a distinction and reject it; shun it
  3. There is a clear need discriminate; be precise
  4. *Evil* (ponēros)—[evil](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?t=KJV&Criteria=evil*+G4190) (51x), [wicked](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?t=KJV&Criteria=wicked*+G4190) (10x), [evil things (2X)](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?t=KJV&Criteria=%22evil+things%22+G4190)

**Matthew 12:45**—*Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.*

* 1. Discern good and evil

**2 Samuel 14:17b**—… *But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that is in the earth.”*

**Ephesians 5:10**—*trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

* 1. *Good* (*kalos)—*that which is inherently noble; inherently true; inherently right; righteous and genuine; excellent in its nature and characteristics
  2. **Application:** when you’re hearing, reading, listening to preaching, examine it carefully. Put it to the test (against the truths of the Word) and cling to the good; reject that which does not hold to the standard; reject it).
  3. If it is not good, it is evil (in any form); we hold it far away from us; we separate ourselves from it

**Psalm 1:1-2**—*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!* ***2****But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.*

* 1. To be clear, evil is never static
     1. It is always active
     2. It is not to be toyed with
     3. It is not simply objective and motionless
     4. Don’t expose your mind to it
     5. It has a corrupting influence
     6. It is malignant and harmful
     7. It is working disaster
     8. It is like a poison or infectious disease
     9. Avoid it like the plague
  2. Perhaps the greatest form of wickedness is spiritual lies

1. **Application**: your witness and testimony as a Christian and representative of Christ is directly related to your discernment regarding the truth.
   1. You represent Christ

**2 Corinthians 5:20**—*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ for, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

* 1. How is that witness in your words, thoughts and actions?
  2. Additionally, the blessings from the Lord, fruitfulness, joy in your walk is directly related tied to discernment

1. When the church loses its ability to discern, it puts her in a disastrous situation
2. **The Question**
3. Why is there such a lack of discernment?
   1. Weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction[[1]](#footnote-2)
   2. A lack of thinking biblically
      1. Due to a lack of understanding
      2. Ignorance
      3. Faulty hermeneutics (biblical interpretation)
   3. Poor pastors/elders/leaders who do not think clearly or precisely or carefully about the Word of God
   4. With the absence of real persecution, there can be a slide toward theological complacency
   5. When there is a strong stance theologically, there is generally a high degree of criticism from other “Christians”
   6. In a highly pluralistic, syncretistic tolerant environment, strong theological positions will be highly criticized
   7. Satan loves it when the church has no right interpretation of scripture and tolerates everything without precision or conviction
   8. We increasingly have a church that has little doctrinal clarity or cares little for doctrine in general
   9. It is far more relativistic and replaced the written word with entertainment, self-absorbed stories, performing arts, emotional, experiential, and mystical
   10. It is not mental or rational—that’s dry, boring, and old school. They need a “fresh word”
4. **Summary:** without sound doctrine and conviction then there is no standard by which we are to discern spiritual truths
5. **Pick a doctrinal truth**
   1. Trinity
   2. Sovereignty
   3. Justification
   4. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
   5. The authority of Scripture
   6. The sufficiency of Scripture
   7. Sanctification
   8. The perseverance of the saints
6. There are fixed standards that by definition do not move
7. Therefore, you better know your fixed biblical theology well; otherwise, you will drift, waffle, or capitulate
8. Genuine Biblical theology has stood the test of timed and upheld by a great could of witness

**Hebrews 12:1-3**—*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,****2****fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.****3****For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

**Conclusion**

We are called to be discerning and to do so well, we need a conviction about sound doctrine. Many have given their all for the biblical truths that they would not recant. Convictions will not let go. We please Him when we have great faith to face the opposition because we believe what He has said—without question. May God give each of us greater faith to overcome the inevitable opposition and persecution.

**Revelation 2:7b**—To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

1. John MacArthur [↑](#footnote-ref-2)