**Discernment, How to get it, Pt. 2**

*Various passages*

**Context**

**1 Thessalonians 5:19-22***—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.*

As we examine Paul’s words to these believers, he largely is describing discernment. It is hearing and examining what you hear against the truths revealed in Scripture.

**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.*

Sadly, in the church today, there is widespread abandonment of discernment. The precision that the Scripture requires is no longer held in high regard. Anything and everything is tolerated and accepted. In a highly pluralistic, syncretistic environment, any adherence to doctrinal and theological truths and positions are criticized. Nevertheless, we must hold to sound doctrine knowing that there will be fierce opposition to it.

**2 Thessalonians 2:15***—So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*

**1 Timothy 1:18-19***—**This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,****19****keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.*

**2 Timothy 1:13***—Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

**Titus 2:1***—But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.*

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. Those who 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**)

**Why a lack of Discernment?**

1. **Reasons:**
2. Weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction[[1]](#footnote-2)
3. A lack of thinking biblically
   1. Due to a lack of understanding
   2. Ignorance
   3. Faulty hermeneutics (biblical interpretation)
4. Poor pastors/elders/leaders who do not think clearly or precisely or carefully about the Word of God
5. Not wanting to be argumentative
   1. People don’t want to disagree
      1. Because they don’t want opposition
      2. Because it’s easier
      3. Because they don’t want to divide
   2. They think God would want us “to get along” so don’t make waves.

When you remove polemics from the church, the church dies.[[2]](#footnote-3)

* 1. There is an ongoing need for reform in the church
  2. We must be antithetical (this is wrong and that is wrong); without it there is no doctrinal clarity and relativism prevails

**Proverbs 16:21**—*The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.* (ESV)

In the Bible, where antithesis is so important, discernment-the ability to distinguish God's thoughts and God's ways from all others-is essential.[[3]](#footnote-4)

* 1. Throughout the bible, we are told the difference between truth and error
     1. There is a right way and there are many wrong ways
     2. There is God’s way and there is man’s way
  2. Consider the OT ceremonial laws
     1. Many were not moral in nature
     2. Clean vs unclean
     3. These were very intentional and not arbitrary
     4. Why? Because in so doing so it underscored the need to do things prescriptively as God has established it as the Sovereign Lord. It reinforced a central principle: there is right way to do things (God’s way) and there is a wrong way to do things
     5. Biblical Primer – the basics
     6. Sadly, the church can easily get caught into thinking that God will just be OK with whatever
  3. Do we really try to distinguish God’s way from every other way?

***Titus 1:9****—holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

* + 1. holding fast—having a strong grip on the faithful Word
    2. Teach sound biblical doctrine and adhere to it with deep convictions

**1 Timothy 4:6**—*In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.*

* + 1. faithfully teach (exhort in sound doctrine)
* Scripture will encourage in godliness
  + 1. adamantly defend (refute those who contradict)
* Confronts sin and error
  + 1. We are to remain undefiled from the world

**James 1:27**—*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

**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. **Point:** Discernment will only flourish in an environment where you can confront ideas to distinguish black and white

**Isaiah 5:20-21**—*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!* ***21****Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!*

1. There can be amongst church leaders an obsession with image and influence
   1. User/seeker-friendly churches
   2. “Effective” evangelism only happens when you appeal to the unbelievers
   3. The focus is making the unbeliever feel good about Christianity
   4. In so doing, you’ve watered down the gospel because you don’t talk about those “offensive” issues—sin, hell, evil, repentance, holy living, denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus
   5. It redefines the church to exclude anything that does not make them feel welcomed or feel good
   6. The myth of influence seduces Christians into believing that by compromising important theological truths more people can be influenced for Christ.[[4]](#footnote-5)
   7. To be clear, the illusion that anyone comes to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ because of the influence of another is patently false
      1. People hear and believe the gospel
      2. That does not mean that we should not live lives that influence other people
         1. We don’t isolate from others

**Matthew 5:13**—*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.*

**1 Peter 3:15-17***—Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?****14****But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,****15****but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence*

* + - 1. The danger comes, however, when Christians adopt a notion of influence derived from the world of politics or business.[[5]](#footnote-6)
  1. There is the idea where churches need to reinvent themselves—teaching interpretation, theology, etc.
     1. They don’t need the past
     2. They need new words
     3. There is no interest in a grammatical historical understanding of scripture

**Point:** Discernment cannot survive in an environment where doctrine doesn’t matter, people refuse to debate or argue to test things or to disagree or refuse to say something/someone is wrong.

1. **In contrast**

**2 Timothy 2:15-16**—*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.* ***16****But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,****17****and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,****18****men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.****19****Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”*

1. Workman—craftsman
2. Never wanting to be ashamed of our lives, our testimony, our ministry
3. Approval to God is connected to accurately handling the Word of Truth
4. Accuracy and correctly interpreting has to be where it starts
5. One is then to proclaim it boldly
6. There additionally is a need to discipline those who are out of God’s will by refusing to repent
   1. Church discipline in the church is a serious matter

**Matthew 18:15-20**—*“If your brother sins], go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.****16****But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.****17****If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.****18****Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.* ***19****“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.****20****For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*

* 1. To say that you believe the bible, and interpret it correctly, but don’t correct simply says that it doesn’t matter in practical matters
  2. In essence, churches tolerate sinning Christians
  3. Consequently, it lowers the value of the truth, because it is cheapened
  4. The result is dulling the edge of the sword of the Spirit
  5. The church can never be a place where we do not confront sin and unbelievers feel comfortable; nor is it a place where Christians are not called to repentance and taught to live holy, set-apart lives for the Lord
  6. To do anything less is dishonoring the Lord of the Church

**Conclusion**

**1 Peter 2:9-12**— But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy *nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;****10****for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* ***11****Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.****12****Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

1. John MacArthur [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Martin Lloyd-Jones [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Jay Adams [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [W. Robert Godfrey](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/teachers/w-robert-godfrey), The Myth of Influence [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-6)