

Spiritual growth 15 - Discernment

Last week we talked about being double-minded. It is not really hard to identify what being double-minded is and with a little analysis you can see various ways that we can fall into this. But there is a problem with this that needs to be considered. I think a lot of people would like to avoid being double-minded, at least in theory. However, as easy as it should be to see it, it is possible that people might not always realize that they are being double-minded. For instance, it shouldn't be hard to recognize that there is a problem with sitting down with a brother for fellowship, prayer, and a couple of beers. I *could* give a long list of things that shouldn't have to take a lot of thought, but people blind themselves to them. People indulge in things to accommodate sin in their lives that would very obviously reveal their problem of being double-minded.

Matt 7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The narrow highway of life is strewn with a lot of people who were double-minded and thought they could just travel along carelessly. They have the testimony, "I used to go to church..." I have heard people describe how they wish they could go back to those days.

In order to truly avoid the doom of being double-minded people need to add on discernment.

1. We need discernment.

In 1992, one author wrote:

At a recent gathering of seminary professors, one teacher reported that at his school the most damaging charge one student can lodge against another is that the person is being "judgmental." He found this pattern very upsetting. "You can't get a good argument going in class anymore," he said. "As soon as somebody takes a stand on any important issue, someone else says that the person is being judgmental. And that's it. End of discussion. Everyone is intimidated!"

Many of the other professors nodded knowingly. There seemed to be a consensus that the fear of being judgmental has taken on epidemic proportions. Is the call for civility just another way of spreading this epidemic? If so, then I'm against civility. But I

really don't think that this is what being civil is all about.

Christian civility does not commit us to a relativistic perspective. Being civil doesn't mean that we cannot criticize what goes on around us. Civility doesn't require us to approve of what other people believe and do. It is one thing to insist that other people have the right to express their basic convictions; it is another thing to say that they are right in doing so. Civility requires us to live by the first of these principles. But it does not commit us to the second formula. To say that all beliefs and values deserve to be treated as if they were on a par is to endorse relativism -- a perspective that is incompatible with Christian faith and practice. Christian civility does not mean refusing to make judgments about what is good and true. For one thing, it really isn't possible to be completely nonjudgmental. Even telling someone else that she is being judgmental is a rather judgmental thing to do!

—Uncommon Decency, Richard J. Mouw, pp. 20-21

What the author is pointing out is how the world pressures us to not exercise discernment. To have discernment means to be able to critically analyze the difference between opposing ideas and issues, and then to judge things to be right or wrong. The world is so anxious to escape the discomfort of criticism that they think it is a sin to call anything wrong. If you remove any sense of judgment, discernment is abandoned because it serves no purpose in an anti-judgmental world. The author further points out the hypocrisy of the world. The world has no problem in judging others because in criticizing those who exercise discernment and judgment, they, themselves, are being judgmental! In our day [2020], our modern culture will condemn, cancel, and destroy you if you do not approve *and* promote their ungodly philosophies and morality.

Isa 5:18-21 Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope:

19That say, Let him make speed, *and* hasten his work, that we may see *it*: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know *it*!
[Men will sin as much as they want and dare God to do something about it.]

20Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21Woe unto *them that are* wise in

their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

It is almost as if we live in Bizarro World where everything is the opposite of normal earth. It is not enough to *tolerate* those who are evil, you must *call* evil good. Abortion is good because having a child can stand in your way of getting Hollywood awards. Drugs, alcohol, and other intoxicants are good because it helps you ignore the problems of the world. You are good if you enable and reinforce an immature and impressionable child's confusion about being a boy or girl. Sodomy is to be celebrated and *you* are the sinner for not supporting it. Burning down cities, killing blacks, and blinding the police is considered exercising your rights as an American all in the name of building the economy for the poor, protesting black deaths, and seeking safety for the oppressed. Telling gross lies in order to accuse someone of being a liar is considered brave and righteous.

But especially notice vs. 21 again: Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! This is the very definition of post-modernism where truth is relative and people are praised for the strength of speaking "their truth," or in other words, *their* version of the truth about themselves rather than the truth as a sane world would know about them. Discernment involves *wise* perception.

2. We are called to be discerning.

We not only *need* to be discerning, we have a *call* to be discerning. God calls on us to be able to differentiate between the world and the kingdom and we must not simply ignore it.

Phil 1:9-10 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

We are supposed to be approving all things that are excellent in order to be without offense. The word approve should not be used in a casual way as in simply giving your permission for something to be done or used. The word approve in vs. 10 has the idea of testing something to see if it meets a standard of holiness. There is nothing material in this life that will ever be perfect. There are no plans that we can make that will perfectly meet all needs. But the kind of discernment we need is the kind that keeps us from sin.

The idea of being sincere in vs. 10 means to be without hypocrisy. This problem is not something that just gets held against Christians, it is almost universal. People quickly judge

hypocrisy when *anyone* makes claims that they don't live up to. It is very possible to talk about the most difficult subjects without having a problem. *However*, people are not so happy and kind when there is hypocrisy involved. For the sake of our testimony, we have to be careful in testing by the Bible and Christian values whether something is Godly or not and then live consistently by it.. Even if you think no one is noticing, I will guarantee you that people are talking behind your back.

3. We are challenged to be discerning.

We *need* to be discerning, we are *called* to be discerning, and we are *challenged* to be discerning. In other words, we will be judged for *not* being discerning.

We have been given so much. Consider that we have *all* the Word of God. The *apostles* did not have so much. You might say that they had Jesus Christ with them, but there were things that they did not understand while He was here. There were things that were yet to be revealed to them. I am sure they wished that as I learned more and more they could go back to a time when they were walking in the company of Jesus and ask Him for further elaboration. Over the centuries, theologians have tackled great questions of doctrine. For every doctrine, there are numerous challenges that people have been brought up.

Luke 12:48-49 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:** and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

49I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?

We have so much more available to us just in having the whole revelation of God's Word and then in all the examination and cross examination and experience of believers over the last 2000 years. There is a judgment for those who do despite to, or treat with contempt, all that God has given us. Jonathan Edwards described it this way, "Apostasy, beloved, is to do despite to the Spirit of grace; that is, to spitefully treat the Holy Spirit of God, and to despise Him in our lives. Oh, what dangerous ground to be on my friends!" Apostasy is an abandonment of sound doctrine. Edwards pointed out that when someone is apostate he is judging God's Word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit as mean, vile, and worthless. One does not have to be an all out apostate who has turned his back on the God who saved him to come under such judgment. To *whatever* degree we diminish the

knowledge of God we diminish our ability to be discerning and therefore our ability to reach others.

4. We need discernment to teach others.

We *need* to be discerning, we are *called* to be discerning, we are *challenged* and judged for *not* being discerning, and we need to be discerning so we can reach and teach others.

Heb 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

14But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Paul was challenging the Jews in their calling. How much *more* should *we* who *have* much more, including a completed Bible and hindsight, attend to the calling to exercise discernment. The role of the priests in the Old Testament was described by Ezekiel:

Ezek 44:23 And they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

5. We should pray for discernment

We *need* to be discerning, we are *called* to be discerning, we are *challenged* to be discerning, we need discernment to teach others, so we need to *pray for* discernment. There is no shame in being an amateur theologian and Bible student. The shame comes when the amateur is overly confident.

Prov 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

Prov 29:20 Seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

These two verses describe an arrogant amateur. They not only think more of themselves than they should, they have nothing to say but doesn't let that stop them from saying it.

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than

he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Prov 26:16 The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

It is interesting to know that the least qualified people also think they are the most knowledgeable and qualified. Those who are wise in their own conceit don't know enough to know that they don't know what they are talking about. Those who are wise, it turns out, are less confident in themselves because they are informed enough to know that there are things they still need to find out.

I have found it interesting when I have polled the congregation about how many have ever or still do have insecurities about themselves. Without hesitation, every hand has gone up. First, that shows that you are no fools. Second, it is good to confess our need for wisdom from God.

Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, was in touch with reality (this changed as he got older, unfortunately). He knew his limitations. Listen to his prayer:

1Kings 3:9-13 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

10And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

13And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

Jas 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

If you had a genie in a magic lantern grant you three wishes, what would you wish? Endless wishes? Solomon had a specific situation that was the focus of

his prayer. Now, you don't have a genie, but if you could ask one thing of God and you could enlarge the scope of your wish beyond what Solomon had, what would it be? Would it be endless wishes? You're thinking would be too small. You have to be careful what you wish for, it could mean endless trouble. The original story of Aladdin and his lamp taught the moral that with each of your wishes there would be a curse to go with it. When we pray for things according to our understanding, it is easy to see that that could be a bigger problem. We should rather pray for God to do what is best for us. You *can* ask something even greater of God. Would it be a car? Too small. A house? Too small. Perhaps a mansion? Too small. How about a mansion in glory to enjoy in the presence of God? How about discernment?

6. We need to prepare for discernment.

The world would like you to abandon your discernment. In order to judge between right and wrong we have to use *righteous* judgment.

John 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

A story is told by E. Schuyler English: "A man who lived on Long Island was able one day to satisfy a lifelong ambition by purchasing for himself a very fine barometer. When the instrument arrived at his home, he was extremely disappointed to find that the indicating needle appeared to be stuck, pointing to the sector marked 'HURRICANE.' The weather looked beautiful. After shaking the barometer very vigorously several times, its new owner sat down and wrote a scorching letter to the store from which he had purchased the instrument. The following morning on the way to his office in New York City, he mailed the letter. That evening he returned to Long Island to find not only the barometer missing, but his house also. The barometer's needle had been right – the storm that passed through while he was in New York City was a hurricane!"
— R.V., Our Daily Bread, April 28

A barometer is an impersonal object. It just tells it like it is. God's Word just tells it like it is when it comes to righteousness and wickedness. We have got to be willing to submit ourselves to *whatever* God says and the lessons we learn from other believers in our lives. If we are not *willing* then it is likely that we will not recognize the Godliness of the advice from our brothers and sisters *or* God.

Deception is Satan's trademark, and it's nothing new. The very first book of the Bible tells of his trickery with Eve in the Garden of Eden: He planted seeds of doubt about God's words by asking, "Indeed, has God said ... ?" (Gen. 3:1). And this is still the devil's primary tactic because deception blinds people to the truth.

If you've ever accepted a false belief or been intentionally deceived, you know how devastating it is to feel betrayed. Now imagine the utter ruination Satan causes by blinding people to the truth of the gospel. It's hard to imagine the countless souls who will suffer eternally because of his trickery.

However, the devil doesn't limit his efforts to preventing faith. He also works diligently to deceive believers by feeding us discouraging thoughts: he insinuates God doesn't care when we're going through difficulties and suggests He's unjust for allowing our suffering. Our enemy also prompts us to dwell on the wrongs done to us or the things God hasn't provided so we'll hold grudges, complain, and find fault.

All this robs us of the joy, gratitude, and peace that are ours in Christ. Our first defense against deception is a mind filled with truth from God's Word so we can discern the lies before they poison our emotions and contaminate our behavior.

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<https://www.intouch.org/read/magazine/daily-devotions/satan-s-strategy>

Heb 4:12 For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

2Pet 1:2-9 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6And to knowledge temperance;
and to temperance patience; and
to patience godliness;

7And to godliness brotherly
kindness; and to brotherly
kindness charity.

8For if these things be in you,
and abound, they make *you that*
ye shall neither *be* barren nor
unfruitful in the knowledge of
our Lord Jesus Christ.

9But he that lacketh these things
is blind, and cannot see afar off,
and hath forgotten that he was
purged from his old sins.

Getting saved is the most important thing in life. If you don't have salvation, then nothing else matters. In salvation, you have the ultimate blessing of eternal life in heaven. However, getting saved is just the beginning of what God has for you while you are here on earth and that requires discernment.

Matt 7:13-14

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2. We are called to be discerning. Phil 1:9-10
3. We are challenged to be discerning. Luke 12:48-49
4. We need discernment to teach others. Ezek 44:23
5. We should pray for discernment Prov 26:12, Prov 29:20, Rom 12:3, Prov 26:16, 1Kings 3:9-13, Jas 1:5
6. We need to prepare for discernment. John 7:24, Heb 4:12, 2Pet 1:2-9