

In understanding

Be mature

1 COR 14:20

The need for Discernment

In the Church

PS. 119:66

In understanding be mature

"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature."

1 Cor 14:20

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

John 7:24

Many people believe that we are not to judge anyone, that judgment belongs to God alone, but this is often an over simplification to resist personal scrutiny. God says differently if we have a heart to hear from Him.

"Hear then the parable of the Sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

*Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the **tares** became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the **wheat** with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"*

Matt 13:18-30

God gave us all this teaching so that we can have discernment concerning the nature of the visible and the invisible church. And not expect from others what they cannot produce because they are not abiding in the true Vine. It helps us not to give leadership to inappropriate people. *“By their fruit you will know them.”* Matt 7:16

If we cannot see what is going on around us and within us we cannot give the needed teaching that shows a light on each man's heart. Insight requires discernment, and discernment requires we make some value judgments concerning our behaviour and the ways of others.

Discerning the life of the invisible church of the Spirit “the Wheat”

Wheat is the planting of God, and abiding in Christ, and producing the fruit of His life and Mission. The wheat has a covenant relationship with Christ, His life is given to us in return for our life given to Him.

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” Ezekiel 36:27

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

Luke 9:23

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matt 28:19-20

“And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

Acts 5:32

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

Rom 8:14

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

John 14:15

‘Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.’

Eph 5:21

‘Therefore, confess your sins to one another,’

James 5:16

‘With all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.’

Col 3:16

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5

'For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.'

2 Cor 5:14-15

'So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.'

Rom 8:4-5

'The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.'

Rom 8:6

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Heb13:17

"But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

1 Thess 5:12-14

'Examine everything; hold firmly to that which is good,'

1 Thess 5:21

"We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

Col 1:28

"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,"

Col 2:6

"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Col 3:2-3

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Rom 12:1-2

'But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.'

2 Tim 2:23-26

'Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.'

Eph 5:6-10

'But realise this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.'

2 Tim 3:1-5

'Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,'

Titus 3:10

'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.'

2 Tim 4:3-4

'The one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.'

2 John 1:9

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matt 6:19-21

This Spirit lived life will show evidence of self denial in obedience and humility with a passion for conformity to the life of Christ.

Discerning the visible church of the flesh, “the Tares.”

The tares are the planting of self, all show and no go, and of no kingdom value. No fruit of the life of Christ and His Mission because they still abide with themselves.

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

John 15:6

"He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 3:36

'For the mind set on the flesh is death,'

Rom 8:6

'Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;'

2 John 1:9-10

'If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.'

1 Tim 6:3-5

“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

1 John 2:15-16

See the difference and act accordingly

This fleshly life will show evidence of stubbornness and pride in self centeredness that resists sound teaching. Those who do not produce the fruit of Christ cannot reflect the light of His life because they don't have His life in them by the Spirit who creates in them a new person chosen by God to be transformed into the image of Christ.

How is it possible to carry out the much required church discipline to retain purity without making judgements concerning people's behaviour?

Jesus Christ is only our Lord when we live for Him and not ourselves. This is when His passion for the kingdom of God has become our heart's great desire by the working of His Spirit in our regeneration. This is so that we live to build up His body as the Spirit filled church and take His gospel of a life to be lived with God in holiness and truth into the world of darkness, into the world that doesn't know Him. This is in order to make other disciples who will deny themselves and take up their cross to follow Him and make other disciples.

The church is about sacrificially serving Jesus Christ and not about what we want to make up comfortable in the world. Is our discontent with where He has placed us serving His purpose? Is our grumbling about His training in adversity showing gratitude for His salvation? Is our impatience with the disagreeable aspects of life showing His humility? Is our anger consistent with His mercy? Is our self absorption dishonouring God? In understanding be mature.

We need Christian Character and Discernment

The word, discern, means “to distinguish, to separate out by diligent search, to examine.” Discernment is the ability to properly discriminate or make determinations. It is related to wisdom. The Word of God itself is said to discern the thoughts and intentions of one’s heart. Heb 4:12

A discerning mind demonstrates wisdom and insight that go beyond what is seen and heard. For example, God’s Word is “spiritually discerned.” To the human mind without the Spirit, the things of God are “foolishness.” (1 Cor 2:14) The Spirit, then, gives us spiritual discernment. Christians today are to be discerning. Paul prayed for believers “*to discern what is best . . . until the day of Christ.*” Phil 1:10

Seeking discernment is a goal for all who desire to walk righteously: “*Who is wise? He will realise these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*” Hosea 14:9

We are commanded to “*hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*” (Rom 12:9) But, unless we have true discernment, how can we determine what is “evil” and what is “good”? In order to maintain the purity of the gospel, the church must distinguish truth from heresy. Wisdom also demands that we properly discriminate between what is “best” and what is merely “good.”

Ligonier Ministries The teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul

What Is Discernment?

Sinclair Ferguson May 08, 2020

Someone I know recently expressed an opinion that surprised and in some ways disappointed me. I said to myself, “I thought he would have more discernment than that.” The experience caused me to reflect on the importance of discernment and the lack of it in our world. We know that people often do not see issues clearly and are easily misled because they do not think biblically. But, sadly, one cannot help reflecting on how true this is of the church community, too.

Most of us doubtless want to distance ourselves from what might be regarded as “the lunatic fringe” of contemporary Christianity. We are on our guard against being led astray by false teachers. But there is more to discernment than this. True discernment means not only distinguishing the right from the wrong; it means distinguishing the primary from the secondary, the essential from the indifferent, and the permanent from the transient. And, yes, it means distinguishing between the good and the better, and even between the better and the best. Thus, discernment is like the physical senses; to some it is given in unusual measure as a special grace gift (1 Cor. 12:10), but some measure of it is essential for us all and must be constantly nourished. The Christian must take care to develop his “sixth sense” of spiritual discernment. This is why the psalmist prays, *“Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.”* (Ps. 119:66).

The Nature of Discernment

But what is this discernment? The word used in Psalm 119:66 means “taste.” It is the ability to make discriminating judgments, to distinguish between, and recognize the moral implications of, different situations and courses of action. It includes the ability to “weigh up” and assess the moral and spiritual status of individuals, groups, and even movements. Thus, while warning us against judgmentalism, Jesus urges us to be discerning and discriminating, lest we cast our pearls before pigs (Matt. 7:1, 6). A remarkable example of such discernment is described in John 2:24–25: *“Jesus would not entrust himself to them ... for he knew what was in a man”* (NIV).

This is discernment without judgmentalism. It involved our Lord's knowledge of God's Word and His observation of God's ways with men (He, supremely, had prayed, "*Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.*" Ps. 119:66)

Doubtless His discernment grew as He experienced conflict with, and victory over, temptation, and as He assessed every situation in the light of God's Word. Jesus' discernment penetrated to the deepest reaches of the heart. But the Christian is called to develop similar discernment. For the only worthwhile discernment we possess is that which we receive in union with Christ, by the Spirit, through God's Word.

So discernment is learning to think God's thoughts after Him, practically and spiritually; it means having a sense of how things look in God's eyes and seeing them in some measure "*uncovered and laid bare*" (Heb. 4:13).

The Impact of Discernment

How does this discernment affect the way we live? In four ways:

1. It acts as a means of protection, guarding us from being deceived spiritually. It protects us from being blown away by the winds of teaching that make central an element of the gospel that is peripheral or treat a particular application of Scripture as though it were Scripture's central message.

2. Discernment also acts as an instrument of healing, when exercised in grace. I have known a small number of people whose ability to diagnose the spiritual needs of others has been remarkable. Such people seem able to penetrate into the heart issues someone else faces better than the person can do. Of course, this is in some ways a dangerous gift with which God has entrusted them. But when exercised in love, discernment can be the surgical scalpel in spiritual surgery that makes healing possible.

3. Again, discernment functions as a key to Christian freedom. The zealous but undiscerning Christian becomes enslaved—to others, to his own uneducated conscience, to an unbiblical pattern of life. Growth in discernment sets us free from such bondage, enabling us to distinguish practices that may be helpful in some circumstances from those that are mandated in all circumstances. But in another way, true discernment

enables the free Christian to recognize that the exercise of freedom is not essential to the enjoyment of it.

4. Finally, discernment serves as a catalyst to spiritual development: “The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning” (Prov. 14:6, NIV). Why? Because the discerning Christian goes to the heart of the matter. He knows something about everything, namely that all things have their common fountain in God. Increase in knowledge, therefore, does not lead to increased frustration, but to a deeper recognition of the harmony of all God’s works and words.

How is such discernment to be obtained? We receive it as did Christ Himself—by the anointing of the Spirit, through our understanding of God’s Word, by our experience of God’s grace, and by the progressive unfolding to us of the true condition of our own hearts. That is why we also should pray, “*I am your servant; give me discernment*” (Ps. 119:125, NIV). This excerpt is taken from *In Christ Alone* by Sinclair Ferguson.

Therefore

‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.’
1 John 4:1

‘And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.’
Phil 1:9–10

“Without absolutes revealed from without by God Himself, we are left rudderless in a sea of conflicting ideas about manners, justice and right and wrong, issuing from a multitude of self-opinionated thinkers.”
John Owen

We must Be Discerning

On a scale somewhere between infant and Christ we are in danger of masking ourselves comfortable and don’t want anyone to tell us we need to keep growing. The worldly state of the church reveals to the world that the uninformed or partially informed are in the majority.

There are many who behave as if they have arrived at the goal of sanctification, and this is obvious because of the lack of humility in

allowing personal correction to take place in the life of the church. Our general resistance to accept admonishment and exhortation from one another is clear evidence of pride. Sanctification doesn't take place effectively in isolation; it is a body work of synergy. God's synchronism keeps all the gears working together to move the church towards Christ-likeness.

Each one of us will believe what we want according to the flesh that remains unrestrained in our lives. So we need each other to be spiritually discerning in order to help us see what is invisible to our minds eye. We need to be mature in our discernment because we have a tendency to isolate ourselves and make our bed to our liking and then sleep in it.

Until we are willing for the Holy Spirit to move us by the word of God or by the work of His obedient children, we have our religion the way we like it. Our Father would use His Spirit led children to help us keep our eyes clear of impediments that bind us to the world. This is true because everyone knows we see the fault in others long before we are led to see it in ourselves.

While we may belong to the planting of God, that doesn't mean there are not some harmful tares or weeds that remain in our lives.

The body is predetermined by God to grow by that which every joint supply. This is another example of the father's wisdom.

'For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.' Rom 12:3-8

Living Water Resources

Come to the River

The need for Discernment

In the Church

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in your commandments.”* Ps. 119:66

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