

# Discernment

**Text: Hebrews 5:12-14**

## I. The Meaning and Purpose of Discernment

- A. Its meaning.
  - 1. "A distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging..." (W.E. Vine)
  - 2. To see and identify by noting differences such as distinguishing good from evil, right from wrong, truth from error.
- B. It is not choosing between the pleasant and the unpleasant.
  - 1. The choice is between the good and the bad.
  - 2. What may be pleasant may be bad and what may be unpleasant may be good.
  - 3. It is not choosing that which necessarily pleases me but of choosing that which is best for me and others, the church and the gospel.
- C. "By reason of use."
  - 1. The Greek word means by reason of practice or habit. (NKJV footnote: "practice.")
  - 2. Continued application of the standard of God in the life of the Christian enables him to discern properly.
  - 3. The new Christian can apply the simple truths of the first principles but as he grows and matures in Christ, gaining more knowledge and understanding, making application as he goes along, he increases his ability to understand and apply the more complex, difficult ones.
    - a. The recipients of the book of Hebrews had failed in this.
    - b. The spiritual growth of the recipients of Hebrews was not only stunted but they had reverted to infancy.
- D. For the good of the soul we need to develop the habit of weighing matters by God's standard.
  - 1. Much trouble can be prevented: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."
  - 2. No matter who you are, you can make mistakes.
    - a. Even the great made mistakes in discernment: Moses, David, etc.
    - b. "Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged always understand justice." (Job 32:9)

## II. Good and Evil

- A. Most people are against any attempt to classify good and evil in spiritual matters.
  - 1. To them, nearly all moral practices are good and almost all religious teachings are right.
  - 2. Some will use a flexible standard based on the individual.
    - a. No absolute right and wrong.
    - b. Every person becomes a “god” unto himself.
    - c. If this principle were true, no one could ever choose evil provided he thought he was doing good. (Prov. 14:12)
  - 3. Some ways are good, some evil. Some things are good, others evil.
    - a. Thinking and acting that it is good does not make the evil good.
    - b. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20)
- B. The right or wrong of a thing is not just a matter of personal thinking.
  - 1. Truth and right are facts presented in Scripture, one must change his mind to fit them rather than changing them to fit his way of thinking.
  - 2. It is more than futile to try to change right to fit oneself, it is an affront to God.
- C. The Bible speaks plainly of good and evil.
  - 1. Good man. (Psa. 37:23) Evil man. (Psa. 140:1)
  - 2. Good works. (Matt. 5:16) Evil works. (Jas. 3:16)
  - 3. Good words. (1 Kings 12:7) Evil speaking. (Eph. 4:31)
  - 4. Good path. (Prov. 2:9) Evil course. (Jer. 23:10)
  - 5. Good advice. (Prov. 20:18) Evil counsel. (Isa. 7:5)
  - 6. Good name. (Prov. 22:1) Evil name. (Deut. 22:19)
  - 7. Good fruit (Matt. 7:17)—evil fruit (Matt. 7:18)
  - 8. Good heart. (Lk. 8:15) Evil heart. (Heb. 10:22)
  - 9. Good morals. (1 Cor. 15:33) Evil dealings. (1 Sam. 2:23)
  - 10. Good report. (Phil. 4:8) Evil report. (2 Cor. 6:8)

## III. Biblical Failures in Discernment

- A. The young prophet who was deceived by a lie. (1 Kings 13)
- B. The foolish rich man. (Luke 12:16-21)
- C. Martha. (Luke 10:38-42)
- D. The Pharisees in Matthew 23:23-25.
- E. Those who brought to Jesus the woman taken in adultery. (John 8:3-11)
  - 1. They demanded the woman be stoned.

2. Their mistakes:
  - a. They did not bring the man.
  - b. They made a spectacle by setting her in the midst of the crowd.
  - c. They did not care whom they hurt just so they carried out their point.
  - d. They beheld the sin in another's life but failed to see the sins in their own lives.
  - e. They pointed to another's sins in an effort to feel better about themselves.
3. Jesus discerned the matter properly by showing more concern for the woman's future than her past.

#### **IV. Some Guideposts for Wise Discernment**

- A. Faith.
  1. Consider the choice of Moses. (Heb. 11:24-25)
  2. Faith led Moses to make a right decision.
- B. Hope. This also influenced Moses. (Heb. 11:26)
- C. Love.
  1. Consider John 14:23.
  2. Scripture speaks of "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." (2 Tim. 3:4)
- D. Courage.
  1. This will surely help in making right decisions. (Matt. 10:28)
  2. King Saul failed to discern properly because he feared the people. (1 Sam. 15:24)
- E. Caution. (Prov. 22:3)
  1. What looks good may not be good.
  2. What appears to be sweet may be bitter.
- G. Investigation.
  1. Never reach a decision of consequence without fully investigating.
  2. Have all the facts before condemning others or plotting a course for yourself.
  3. Deal with knowledge instead of presumption, gossip and rumors. (Prov. 13:6)

#### **Conclusion**

1. It is our duty to discern good and evil, throw out the evil and retain the good.
2. Much trouble arises in the church because of lack of discernment.