

What COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and 'Woke' America is Revealing About the Church

Our Desperate Need for DISCERNMENT

Test everything. Hold fast to what is good.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:21

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

- 2 Timothy 3:1

"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."

- Sinclair Ferguson, "What is Discernment?"

"Discernment is *the skill of understanding and applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.*

When we practice discernment, we are applying the truths of the Bible to our lives. We are attempting to understand the words of the Bible and trusting God's Word to give clarity so we might see things as God sees them. Our goal in discernment is to do just this: to see things through God's eyes through the Bible and thus to see things as they really are. Like wiping the steam from a mirror, we seek to remove what is opaque so we might see with God-given clarity."

- Tim Challies, "Defining Discernment"

"Discernment involves each one of us in thinking in a specifically Christian way about each issue. It requires of us that we employ our minds by informing ourselves through the study of the truth revealed in God's Word. To be grounded in the revealed truth is the surest way to prepare to be able to recognize error. Yet information alone does not provide us with discernment. At the same time our hearts have to be engaged in devotion to Christ. Then and only then will we find ourselves in tune with the mind of God and be able to make judgments and appraisals that accord with that mind, because to the believer is promised the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the ministry of Word and Spirit in the life of the Christian as in the Christian community that produces the certainty of faith and the obedience of faith."

- Robert Norris, "The Lost Art of Discernment"

6 Reasons We Lack Discernment (adapted from John MacArthur, 2016)

1. WEAK _____

"Precise thinking, definition, and dogma have been at a serious discount. The whole emphasis has been placed upon religion as a power which can do things for us and which can make us happy. The emotional and feeling side of religion has been over-emphasized at the expense of the intellectual. Far too often people have thought of the Christian religion merely as something which gives a constant series of miraculous deliverances from all sorts and kinds of ills.... The impression has often been given that we have but to ask God for whatever we may chance to need and we shall be satisfied.... We have been so intent upon ourselves and our moods and feelings and inward states, that when we are confronted by an external problem that nevertheless affects us profoundly, we do not know how to think or where to begin ..." (cited by Ian Murray in *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, p. 24).

2. RELATIVISTIC _____

"People who study the Bible in depth develop antithetical mindsets: They think in terms of contrasts or opposites. From Genesis to Revelation God's thoughts and ways are set over against all others. The Bible does not teach that there are numerous ways to please God, each of which is as good as the next. Nor does it teach that various opinions are more or less God's ways. What it teaches—everywhere—is that any thought or way that is not wholly God's is altogether wrong and must be rejected. According to the Bible, a miss is as good as a mile. There is only one God, and there is only one way of life—His!

People today don't like to hear such things—even people within the church. Why? Because they have a different mindset. Many of them have not known the Bible from childhood or ever made an intensive study of it later on, so their mindset is unbiblical.... With pastors and people alike growing up in an environment that stresses continuum thinking, antithesis is dulled as more and more people attempt to integrate sociology, psychology, and business management principles with Scripture" (Jay Adams, *A Call to Discernment*, pp. 29, 32).

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them. (Hosea 14:9)

3. WORLDLY _____

"Another reason for a lack of spiritual discernment is the church's preoccupation with image and influence as the key to evangelization. Since today's church believes it must win the lost to Christ by winning their favor, it no longer teaches the biblical doctrines of sin, hell, repentance, or the cross because those would offend the lost or make them feel uncomfortable. Instead it markets itself as a benevolent,

non-threatening agency whose primary goal is to achieve prestige, popularity, and intellectual acceptance among the lost. Its premise is, "If they like us, they'll like our Jesus." (John MacArthur)

4. INNACURATE _____

"Unless the believer has sat under good teaching, is well-read, or has learned to interpret Scripture from someone who knows how, it's unlikely he or she will be able to interpret Scripture accurately."

5. LAX _____

The absence of church discipline will kill spiritual discernment and destroy the holiness of the church. Confronting sin effectively puts a wall of division between the world and the church by separating those who obey the Lord from those who don't. It's essential that believers draw the line between right and wrong. The church should be sending a message to the lost that says, "We are a holy people."

6. SPIRITUAL _____

... by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Some costs of lacking discernment:

1) We lose our _____.

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

- 2 Timothy 3:1-5

2) We will adopt a _____ that is not _____.

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human

tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

- Colossians 2:6-8

3) We will _____ or even _____ the Gospel.

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

- Galatians 1:6-10

4) We lose our _____.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

5) We lose our _____.

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13-16

6) We lose our "_____".

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² "'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my

name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

- Revelation 2:1-5

The way forward:

- 1) We have to get into the Word with _____ and _____ ... until God changes the way we _____.

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- Ephesians 4:17-24

Learn to think about God SYSTEMATICALLY.

- 2) We have to _____.

⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil ...

- 1 Kings 3:9

- 3) We have to figure out what our real _____ are and be willing to _____ on them and _____ on them without _____.

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

" ... we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

- Hebrews 13:6

- 4) We have to be _____ in God, _____ with each other, and be ready for _____ and even _____ if need be.

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

- Philippians 1:18-30

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