

Discretion and Discernment

I. Definitions.

- A. **discretion**: Ability to discern or distinguish what is right, befitting, or advisable, esp. as regards one's own conduct or action; the quality of being discreet; discernment; prudence, sagacity, circumspection, sound judgement.
- B. **discreet**: Showing discernment or judgement in the guidance of one's own speech and action; judicious, prudent, circumspect, cautious; often esp. that can be silent when speech would be inconvenient.
- C. **discernment**: a. The act of discerning or perceiving by the intellect; intellectual perception or apprehension. b. The faculty of discerning; discrimination, judgement; keenness of intellectual perception; penetration, insight.
- D. **discern**: *trans.* To separate (things, or one thing from another) as distinct; to distinguish and divide.

II. Discretion and discernment are critical to our success in all things, spiritual or natural.

PSA 112:5; PRO 1:1-4; 2:10-20; 3:21-22.

- A. By these, we put differences between diverse concepts, values, speech, actions, etc.
 - 1. They are integral to our decision-making process.
 - 2. They make it possible for us to analyze probabilities: What is likely to happen? What is likely to succeed or fail? What direction should I take?
- B. By these, we make determinations of good v. bad, right v. wrong, acceptable v. unacceptable, profitable v. unprofitable.
- C. There are distinctions that need to be made or all identity of positive v. negative is lost. This is especially important in areas of morality, service to God, and holiness (that which is for God). **EZE 22:26; 1CO 11:29; HEB 5:14.**
 - 1. The flesh at war with God rejects such distinctions, blurring lines or reversing them. **ISA 5:20; MAL 2:17; 3:15.**
 - 2. Valid judgments are impossible under such conditions. **ISA 59:14-15.**
 - 3. Nothing less than the fear of God cures this. **MAL 3:16-18.**
 - 4. Discretion can save us from a snare of Satan. **ROM 13:14; 1CO 9:27; PSA 101:3.**
 - a. Discernment could have saved the young man from the strange woman. **PRO 7:7-23.**
 - b. Solomon there was able to discern between the simple and the stupid (v. 7), a distinction we all need to remember. There is a difference between the ignorant and the *willingly ignorant* (**2PE 3:5**), between the greenhorn and the fool who is *void of understanding* and acts accordingly.

III. Whereas discernment and discretion are common to all men (though sometimes misused owing to ignorance or lust), there is discernment and discretion that is alien to natural man. **1CO 2:14.**

- A. Natural man is averse to things of the Spirit of God such as Scripture, the reality of sin, hell, heaven, future resurrection, the necessity of the crucifixion, etc. **1CO 1:18; PRO 14:9.**
- B. Natural man is of the earth, the world is in his heart, and things beyond the measurable, observable or tangible (like faith, future judgment, God's existence and omniscience, etc.) do not enter into his decision-making process. **JOH 3:31; ECC 3:11; 1CO 2:11; JUDE 1:10.**
- C. Natural man would not be expected to set his affection on heavenly things (**COL 3:1-2**) to regulate his decision-making process since the notion of a heavenly state is folly to him.

- D. How important is the new birth and quickening of the Spirit! **JOH 3:6-7**.
- IV. We are instructed to be "...proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (**EPH 5:8-10**).
- A. prove: "To make trial of, try, test."
 - B. We are commanded to "...prove all things..." (**1TH 5:21**).
 - C. The purpose for proving all things is to determine if it is good and therefore acceptable to the Lord.
 - D. This process of proving obviously calls for discretion.
 - E. The standard for this proving process is God's will in His precepts (**ROM 12:1-2; PSA 119:128**), not methinks, feelings, the world, circumstances, etc. The divine revelation provided in Scripture exceeds and overrules all natural standards (which are subject to change because of man's limited knowledge and his propensity for power).
 - F. By knowledge gained from Scripture, we can try (test, prove) spirits. **1JO 4:1, 6**.
 1. We can conclude that a prophecy is not of God's Spirit if it disagrees with His revelation and/or doesn't come to pass. **DEU 18:21-22; 13:1-2**.
 2. We can conclude that a God-demanded diet or celibacy is from a *seducing spirit*. **1TI 4:1-3**.
 3. We can conclude that the doctrine of sinner-earned salvation is of the *spirit of the world* since such salvation is not free. **1CO 2:12**.
 4. The Thessalonian saints could, in those days of the spirit of prophecy, determine by apostolic measure that the spirit which troubled men with false concerns about the coming of Christ was not to be heeded (**2TH 2:1-5**), whether that spirit was just the natural *spirit of man* (**1CO 2:11**) floating some idea ignorantly, or a false spirit of prophecy pretending divine revelation.
 - G. The Ephesian saints could discern by apostolic revelation that there were false apostles come unto them. **REV 2:2**.
 1. They could recall the God-given qualifications for the apostolate, especially that one had to be a personal witness of the resurrected Son of God (Paul being a unique case). **ACT 1:21-22; 1CO 15:8**.
 2. They could conclude that if the so-called apostles were teaching works and/or Judaism instead of pure grace that they were false. **2CO 11:13-15**.
 3. They could remember Paul's prophecy in **ACT 20:29** and be prepared to challenge the coming false apostles with knowledge and the Jerusalem church council's letters. **ACT 15:23-24**.
 4. This is the proving/discerning process in action: applying God-given credible information to whatever challenge should come along. This is a power of discernment that we can also use without any special gift from the Spirit of God other than the new birth.
- V. We should attempt to make a distinction in things even if our standard is not flawless.
- A. Since we are sinners in a sinful world, our best attempts will be imperfect. **1KI 8:46**.
 - B. Because your standard is not 100% flawless does NOT mean that it is 100% flawed!
 - C. God looks at the heart even though the outward performance may be lacking. **1KI 15:11-14; 2CH 30:18-20**.
 - D. Those who are most forward to criticize your standard are those who likely do not have a good standard themselves or who simply want to find fault.
- VI. We should so live that we reprove all evil. **EPH 5:1-17**.
- A. We must maintain clear separation from the works of darkness. **EPH 5:11; ROM 13:12**.

1. fellowship: a. Partnership; membership of a society. Also, in political sense, alliance. *Obs.* b. Participation, sharing (in an action, condition, etc.); ‘something in common’, community of interest, sentiment, nature, etc.
 2. Scripture is filled with warnings against joining with others in evil enterprises. **PRO 4:14-17; PSA 1:1 ct/w PSA 119:63.**
 3. The church must not have fellowship with idol religion or unrighteousness. **2CO 6:14-18; 1CO 10:21.**
 4. In proving all things (**1TH 5:21**), we must reprove certain things, making a difference.
 - a. Reproof may be open and confrontational. **LUK 3:19.**
 - b. Reproof may be simply following God in spite of others. **HEB 11:7; MAT 12:41.**
- B. Do not give unbelievers the impression that you condone their ungodliness. **1CO 10:27-29.**
- C. Avoid even the appearance of evil. **1TH 5:22.**
- D. Our religion is not pure and undefiled if we are not unspotted from the world. **JAM 1:27.**
- E. Those who partake with the children of disobedience are in a shameful state of sleep and death from which they are called to awake. **EPH 5:14 c/w 1CO 15:34.**
- F. Rather than being indifferent to what goes on about us, we must be awake and circumspect. **EPH 5:15.**
1. circumspect: Of persons: Watchful on all sides, attentive to everything, cautious, heedful of all circumstances that may affect action or decision.
 2. Prudent men measure the implications of actions, speech, company or circumstances and take appropriate measures. **PRO 22:3.**

VII. We must steer between the extremes of lawlessness which allows anything and abstinence which forbids the enjoyment of lawful things.

- A. There is evil to be abhorred and good to be held. **ROM 12:9.**
- B. God gives us all things to enjoy. **1TI 6:17.**
- C. God severely condemns those who forbid as a matter of doctrine that which God allows. **1TI 4:1-5; COL 2:20-22.**
- D. However, we are to use all things under law to Christ. **1CO 3:21-23; 9:21.**
- E. Liberty is not be construed as a license to exploit the flesh. **GAL 5:13.**
- F. Discern not only what is lawful or unlawful in God’s sight but also what is *expedient*. **1CO 6:12.**
 1. expedient: Conducive to advantage in general, or to a definite purpose; fit, proper, or suitable to the circumstances of the case.
 2. It is hard to walk at liberty when you have let a liberty have power over you. This applies to associations, appetites, entertainments.
 - a. Can you get through a day without your particular liberty? If not, then it isn’t much of a liberty.
 - b. If your liberty is more important to you than your known duty, consider.
 - c. If your liberty hinders the effect of God’s word on you, consider. **LUK 8:14.**

VIII. Young people obviously lack discretion/discernment (JON 4:11) and need to learn it.

- A. NOTE: Experience is a powerful school but often has a high tuition. Young people can save much in tuition costs by learning from other’s errors instead, and by resolving that God knows best what is good for them.

- B. Wise Solomon dedicated much of his instruction to facilitate discretion in his son that he might save himself. **PRO 1:4; 2:11.**
 - C. Young women need to learn discretion and mothers that fail to instruct them thus are not doing them any good service. **TIT 2:5.**
 - 1. Dinah was defiled for lack of discretion. **GEN 34:1-2.**
 - 2. Women in general need to respect **PRO 11:22.** c/w **1PE 3:3-4.**
- IX. Do not confuse education, knowledge and insightfulness with the N.T. gift of *discerning of spirits*. **1CO 12:10.**
- A. Men may have a natural inclination by genetics, learning and self-discipline to be of a keen discerning character, as do some creatures. **PRO 30:24-28.**
 - B. Someone may by wisdom have acute perception of others. **NEH 6:12; ACT 23:29.**
 - C. But the N.T. gift of discerning of spirits was special.
 - 1. Peter by this gift knew that Ananias and Sapphira dissimulated. **ACT 5:3, 9.**
 - 2. Paul by this gift knew Elymas to be a child of the devil. **ACT 13:8-11.**
 - 3. Paul by this gift knew that one of his “supporters” was under the power of an unclean spirit. **ACT 16:16-18.**
 - 4. This gift was a sharing of the omniscience of Jesus Christ Who knew what was in men. **JOH 2:24-25** c/w **HEB 4:12-13.**
 - 5. This special discernment, like the other miracles of the apostolic era, was seasonal until the completed body of apostolic revelation was completed. No man today has this gift other than Jesus Christ.
 - D. A misguided use of perception may conclude that a wheat is a tare when God only knows who are truly His own. **MAT 13:30** c/w **2TI 2:19; JOH 7:24.**
- VIII. The more we grow in love of God, His truth and others, the better will be our discernment. **PHIL 1:9-10.**
- A. “Some Christians are more affectionate, and less knowing; others are more knowing, and less affectionate; it is well when love and knowledge go and keep pace together...”
(John Gill)
 - B. With learning and loving, we will better know how to save others. **JUDE 1:22-23.**
 - C. Thankfully, the way of Christ accommodates even the foolish wayfarer. **ISA 35:8.**
 - 1. “Note, The way to heaven is a plain way, and easy to hit. God has chosen *the foolish things of the world*, and made them wise to salvation. *Knowledge is easy to him that understands.*” (Matthew Henry)
 - 2. **PRO 4:18-19.**