

TABLE TALK

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...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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Discern

discern 1. to separate (a thing) mentally from another or others; recognize as separate or different. 2. to perceive or recognize; make out clearly.
[Webster's New World Dictionary]

discern 1. to perceive by the sight or some other sense or by the intellect; see, recognize, or apprehend: They discerned a sail on the horizon.
2. to distinguish mentally; recognize as distinct or different; discriminate: He is incapable of discerning right from wrong.
[Dictionary.com <<http://Dictionary.com>]

discern In the Old Testament - It may simply mean "observe" - "I discerned among the youths" (Proverbs 7:7; or discriminating knowledge, "A wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment" (Ecclesiastes 8:5).
In the New Testament the words used express a close and distinct acquaintance with or a critical knowledge of things. Used in 1 Corinthians 2:14 (kjv) of "the things of the spirit of God"; in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 of "the (Lord's) body" in the sacrament; in Hebrews 5:14 of a clear knowledge of good and evil as the prerogative of a full-grown man.
[International Standard Bible Encyclopedia]

Put simply, to discern has to do with making a distinction between two or more things. Maybe more often the case than not, it has to do with making a distinction as to what is good as over against what is not as good or maybe even harmful, or the ability to choose what is the best among what is good or the worst among what is bad.

The Old Testament account of Solomon is probably the best example of discernment we can find. Solomon, finding himself as the leader of the nation of Israel, realized the responsibility that had been placed in his hands as to the making of right decisions. So what does he do? He prays to God, "Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, that I

Also in this issue -

- What Is Discernment? page 3
- Regarding the Certainty of What We Believe page 3
- What Is Biblical Discernment, And Why Is It Important? page 3
- The Wisdom of Discernment page 4
- Study on Discernment page 5

may discern between good and evil." And what does God answer? "I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you (1 Kings 3:9,12). It is interesting to note from 2 Chron. 1:10, that what Solomon asked for, in order that he might be able to discern, was that God might give him "wisdom and knowledge."

If one is going to discern... he or she must have a *standard* or a *basis* for discernment. What should I eat? What should I wear? What should I do? Should I concentrate on developing this friendship or that? Should I buy this car... or this house... or that? Should I take that job? To make the best or proper decision... in regard to questions such as these, one has to have some *knowledge* with regard to truth concerning the matter, and further, one has to have some degree of *wisdom* (knowing how to make practical application of the knowledge one has).

But even more important... more significant... and certainly more consequential... is the matter of discernment when it comes to matters spiritual... to matters of the soul. There is no question but that many of the decisions we make with regard to things temporal are important, yet of far greater significance and consequence, are the decisions we make with regard to things eternal. Discernment is key in both areas, but the "wisdom and knowledge needed for discernment is not necessarily the same in both cases.

Just because a person has 'brains' does not mean they are knowledgeable or wise. Just because a person has knowledge does not mean they are wise. And just because a person seems to be a discerning person making good and wise decisions in connection with his home and family life, and/or in connection

with his or her business... does not mean it is, or will be, the case when it comes to matters of the soul.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 2) speaks of imparting a "secret and hidden wisdom"... something different and not understood by even the great men or rulers of the world; but a wisdom that is revealed to believers of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul explains how he and other apostles and teachers, impart this (wisdom) in words not taught by human wisdom but by the Spirit - "interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." Then he says this, "The natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

In the case of Solomon, God gave him the wisdom and knowledge necessary for him to discern in both areas. But as we read and study the life of Solomon we will see that even though he had been given the necessary wisdom and knowledge to properly discern... he didn't always use those gifts. None of this is automatic. We must be in the Word and in prayer. We must be about learning of the things of God and the will of God, and then in seeking the help of the Holy Spirit in using what God has provided us in discerning between good and evil, between the better and the best, between what God desires and what we desire.

This issue of Table Talk includes articles dealing with discerning/discernment in so far as it concerns matters of the soul. Some contributors have been included with whom we may not agree with in every aspect of their theology, however, with regard to the subject at hand their insights are clearly biblical.

What Is Discernment?

Sinclair Ferguson

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The article may be accessed at -
<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/discernment-thinking-gods-thoughts/>

Luther - Regarding the Certainty of What We Believe -

A Christian modestly says to God: Dear Lord, although I am sure of my position, I am unable to sustain it without Thee. Help Thou me, or I am lost. - He is indeed certain of his position, as Peter was on the water (Matt. 14:29). Peter could not be more certain than he was. The water was supporting him. He saw no obstacle in his way. But when the wind came rushing on, he saw what was lacking in him. This must be taken to heart. For although we are sure of our position, we have Scripture, and are covered and armed with clear passages in the very best way, yet our security depends on the power, the will, and the might of God, who protects us and defends us against the devil, our adversary and greatest enemy.

But this happens that God may make us deteremined and yet keep us fearful, so that we are always filled with concern and cry to Him: O Lord, help us, and increase our faith (Lk. 17:5); for without Thee we are undone. At heart we should always feel as if we were just beginning to believe today, and every day we should feel as if we had never heard the Gospel before. We must believe anew every day.

What Is Biblical Discernment And Why Is It Important?

2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 4:14

By John MacArthur

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You may access this article at:

<http://www.gty.org/resources/questions/QA138/what-is-biblical-discernment-and-why-is-it-important>

The Wisdom of Discernment

by Pastor Ken Klaus

Give Your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this Your great people?

1 Kings 3:9

When I graduated from seminary, I knew what I was supposed to be: a college campus chaplain.

Now more than 40 years later, I realize that even though I received more than 40 calls in the course of my ministry, not a single one ever came from a college campus. From this I have figured out two things:

1. The Lord didn't want me on a college campus and
2. I didn't have the gift of prophecy or the ability to discern what was best.

How about you? Has your life turned out the way you dreamed it would 10 or 20 years ago?

I wonder, are your days filled with peace, or have bad decisions and unfulfilled dreams left you with a gnawing in your stomach, an emptiness in your head, a knot in your neck, a fear in your conscience, a desperation, despondency, depression that just doesn't go away?

Do you have the ability to discern what is best?

A moment ago I said that life has taught me two things. That's not exactly right. The Lord has taught me a third. He has shown me the more a person aligns Himself with the Lord's will, the better his life will be. Conversely, the further an individual wanders from the Lord, the more hollow and empty he will find his days.

In short, good, Christian discernment means putting yourself, your decisions, your life into God's hands.

Discernment: that's what St. Paul was talking about when he wrote, "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" (Philippians 1:9-10).

Godly discernment is what

Solomon was praying for when He asked God for the wisdom to discern between good and evil when ruling over the Lord's people. He knew that without God's guidance He would never have the wisdom to govern and make decisions in a God-pleasing manner.

Now there are all kinds of people you can go to for help, assistance, guidance and advice.

You can go to your friends; you can consult the experts, go to the gurus, and test all the theories. If you go that route, you will soon find you are dealing with all kinds of human opinions ... opinions which are often contradictory and at cross-purposes.

This is why the Bible says if you really want to discern what is best, go to the Lord and ask Him for guidance.

You see, He who gave His Son as the ultimate Ransom for our redemption has a vested interest in us.

With Spirit-given faith, He calls us out of the world and creates a new heart within us. That heart is one which knows that no matter what happens to us, no matter what negative situation or counter-productive circumstance might arise, we can have the peace of God, which the world cannot receive or understand.

With Spirit-given faith we will, like Paul and Solomon let the Lord set our path. And if that happens, we will have discerned what is best.

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, give a new and deeper meaning to our prayer, "Thy will be done." May we discern Your will, not ours, is best. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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Editor's note:

The study that follows was taken off the web. There was no copyright and no link to any particular author or church. I was able to determine from some introductory materials that the study was written by a Confessional Lutheran. There has been some minor editing in order that it might serve its intended purpose in this publication.

The intent of the study is to help participants in learning Biblical discernment and how to put it into practice. We need a foundation upon which to base our discernment. Our foundation is the Word of God. Some tools we can use: The Bible, a Bible concordance, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, The Q and A web pages of Confessional Lutheran Church Bodies.

Study on Discernment

Objectives:

After completing the study you should be able to:

- * Be Aware of some Common False Teachings
- * Be Prepared to Respond to Common False Teachings

Bible Interpretation

Have you ever been misinterpreted? You mean to say one thing but somebody walks in half way through your comment and gets the entirely wrong idea.

Misinterpreting happens more often than you think. In fact, sometimes this happens when people read God's Word. Take for example John 15:7b. "Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Some see this passage as proof that God doesn't exist or his Word isn't very honest.

Know the CONTEXT of the Bible Passage.

Context = The surrounding words or ideas in a writing.

- 1) The narrow context of the paragraph/chapter.
- 2) The expanded context of the book in which it is found.
- 3) The broad context of all of Scripture.
- 4) Quality Commentaries and Concordances can help.

Let SCRIPTURE interpret SCRIPTURE.

- 1) Let easier passages explain difficult ones.
- 2) Consider the simple, plain meaning of the words.
- 3) Recognize figures of speech. (Metaphor, Simile, Parable, Hyperbole, etc.)
- 4) Consider the historical background of the context.

Knowing what we now know, how can we go about understanding the promise of John 15:7b? (Hint: Look at the Context.)

Biblical Discernment

People come from all sorts of different backgrounds - Christian and non-Christian. One's own church is an excellent place to witness what Christian life and community looks like first-hand. Because people come from different backgrounds they may carry words or phrases with them that are typically associated with false teaching even if they don't realize it. We want to be loving and understanding in these situations.

Sometimes what you are reading or talking about will draw attention to doctrinal things that have frequently found disagreement between denominations. Depending on the circumstances you may say something like, "That is an interesting topic that deserves more attention," or "I'm not really sure about that. I'd like to look into it and talk about it with a Christian brother or sister or my pastor."

Here are some things that could come up:

1. IS A FALSE TEACHING REALLY THAT BAD? CAN'T WE JUST AGREE TO DISAGREE?

- * Perhaps it is something you can agree to disagree about. There are a lot of things that people hold near and dear which in reality are not commanded or forbidden in the Bible. How do you know? Is there a clear passage on this issue?
- * If there is a clear passage in the Bible concerning the disagreement then we must stand by Scripture. Then it is more than your opinion or interpretation. It stands written by God. Still, you want to hear where the other person(s) is coming from. Look at Scripture together. You may not reach agreement right away. Keep the dialogue open and continue to talk about it, perhaps bring it to another fellow believer and/or a Pastor for advice. There may reach a point if they persist in something that is clearly addressed in the Word that you would part ways. (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:20-22; Rom. 16:17)

2. DECISION THEOLOGY

- * Decision Theology: I have the power/ability to decide to believe in

Jesus as an unbeliever. (Example: Jesus lived and died for you and will save all those who are willing to ask him for salvation. Pray this prayer to invite the Holy Spirit into your heart.)

- * Reasons Decision Theology is False
 - John 1:12-13 - Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (also, 1 Cor. 12:3)
 - It means that Jesus' work of Salvation was not complete until I invited Him in my heart. (2 Cor. 5:14 - Christ died for all)
 - Denies a person's total sinfulness from conception. (Psalm 51:5 - "from conception", Eph 2:1-10 - "dead", 1 Cor. 2:14 - "without Spirit") By nature we are unwilling. It is only the power of the Holy Spirit who converts a person; not a choice or willingness on their part.)
 - Presents a weak God who can't work in your heart unless you say so. (Rev. 3:20 - "Jesus knocking" is to those who are already believers)
 - It is a form of works righteousness by which a person is contributing to their salvation. (Eph. 2:8-9)
 - Often times the focus is more on a person's choice than on Jesus. (John 14:14 - "I am the way")

3. LORD'S SUPPER

- * The Bible teaches Jesus' Body and Blood are Really Present: The Lord's Supper has bread and Jesus' body, wine and Jesus' blood for the forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. (Matt. 26:26-28 - "is", 1 Cor. 10:16, 17 - "participation", 1 Cor. 1:27 - terms used interchangeably)
 - The Catholic Doctrine teaches *Transubstantiation* - "changes into" -- Only Body and Blood.
 - Most Non-denominations, Baptists, Methodists, etc. teach *Representation* -- Only Bread and Wine
- * Fellowship at the altar
 - Participation in Communion/Lord's Supper with people who have stated that they believe what you believe about the Bible, Jesus, Grace, Communion, etc. and are able to properly prepare themselves before partaking [i.e., The Sacraments rightly administered].

4. INFANT BAPTISM

* Biblical Reasons to Baptize Babies.

- Jesus said Baptize all nations. - Matt. 28:19
- Babies are sinful and need a Savior. If God didn't hold them accountable to sin they wouldn't die. - Psalm 51:5
- Baptism Saves - 1 Peter 3:21
- Jesus said "micros" and "brephe" (little ones or infants) can believe in Him. - Mark 9:42
- There are examples of whole households being Baptized. Babies would be included in a whole household. - Acts 16

* Reasons Some Deny Infant Baptism:

- Some deny infant Baptism because there are no specific examples in the Bible.
- They don't feel babies can believe because they can't make a conscious choice (decision theology).
- They feel God wouldn't hold babies accountable for sin.
- They feel Baptism is an act of obedience and, therefore, doesn't offer forgiveness, life, and heaven.

5. MILLENNIALISM and the RAPTURE

* Millennialism Falsely Teaches

- 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth either before or after a great tribulation. Only 2 places that mention the 1,000 years - 2 Peter 3:8 & Rev. 20
- The rapture is a point at which some think Jesus will raise believers so that they will not have to go through the tribulation. They look to 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

* The Bible Teaches

- The 1,000 years of Revelation 20 is referring to the New Testament age. The period that started when Christ ascended to heaven and will end when Jesus comes back for Judgment day. The devil is bound already and the Gospel is being preached to the ends of the earth. (Matt. 24:14 & 1 John 3:8 - "destroyed the devil's work")
- Jesus is not looking to set up an earthly kingdom. (Luke 17:20 - 22)

- "kingdom is within you"; John 18:36 - "not of this world")

- The rapture comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - "caught up" and Matthew 24:40-41 - "taken from the fields." Reading the context you can see that these refer to Judgment Day. (Acts 17:31 - "a day," Acts 1:11 - "in the same way," 1 Cor. 15:51-52 - "all changed in a moment")

6. OVER-EMPHASIS OF THE LAW OR OF THE GOSPEL

* Over-emphasis on Laws and Commands

- Always remember it is the fuel of forgiveness that powers a Christian. (1 John 4:19 - "we love because"). Don't be fueled by guilt, shame, mere obligation, greed, etc. (should, would, could - better, get to).

* Over-emphasis on Gospel

- Understanding our sin and need for a Savior is also important. On this side of heaven we need to regularly confess our sins and take to heart his forgiveness. (Romans 7:13)

7. IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

* Justification = Declared not guilty. Sin is not the defining characteristic of a Christian's life. (1 Cor. 6:9-11 - "new identity - you were," Romans 7:15-25 - "not me but sin living in me," 1 Cor. 15:57-58 - "victory through Jesus").

* Sanctification = Set apart for holy living. (Titus 2:12, 14) We get to say "no" to sin.

8. DEALING WITH LOSS, DEPRESSION, FAMILY STRIFE

* Cast your anxiety on Him together. (Acts 2:42ff - "glad and sincere hearts", 1 Peter 5:7-9 - "same sufferings").

* Ask permission, then ask me (unless someone is in danger - we love them too much to keep it a secret).

Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a 'Forum' in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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For information or to make
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA
2837 East New York St.
Indianapolis, IN 46201

Internet Contact:
revralphs@sbglobal.net

To: