

## **Discernment is What I Need (Part 2)**

Philippians 1:9-11, Hebrews 5:13-14

Pastor Richard Yu

August 9, 2020

A notable example of discernment is how John Piper addressed tension between those prioritizing missions versus social action by reminding them that all suffering matters, especially eternal suffering. Surrounded by conflicting voices, we must find clarity in discernment. In Philippians 1:9-11, Paul prayed for love to abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment. And vv. 10-11 states that this discernment has four purposes. First, it enables us to approve what is excellent, to distinguish and prioritize right from almost right. It means distinguishing God's wisdom from that of the world (Romans 12:2). Second, discernment allows us to be pure and blameless. This word "pure" means testing with sunlight, an ancient technique used to spot deceptively hidden cracks in defective pottery. It means sincerity and genuineness. The word for "blameless" means integrity in relationships, without offense. Third, discernment results in good works, the fruit of righteousness that is done not to win God's acceptance but in response to it. At the start of the outbreak, a pastor in Wuhan said that Christ gave us His peace not to remove us from suffering and death but rather to endure in the midst of it because He has already delivered us from it. Our response is good works. Finally, discernment brings honor and glory to God. The fruit of the Spirit differs from acts of religiosity in that it glorifies Jesus. We cannot boast or take credit for it, because it comes from Jesus, not ourselves.

But how can we attain discernment? Again there are four approaches. The first is humility before God. Verse 11 tells us that discernment comes through Jesus. We don't have what it takes. We see through a self-serving biased lens distorted by our upbringing, insecurities, and prejudices. We tend to care more about expressing our opinions than true understanding, but this is foolishness (Proverbs 18:2). We must realize what we don't know. We must rely on Jesus. In v. 6 Paul says that Jesus began and will complete His good work in us. He is the source, sustainer, and finisher of our ability to love with discernment.

Second, we must make the effort to study God's word diligently. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 says the first act of a king of Israel must be to copy the Law by hand. This copy, once approved by priests, must be read every day so that the king can rule wisely. This is how important Scripture is to discernment. We also see in Acts 17:2-4 that Paul was able to prove to the Thessalonians, using the Old Testament, that Jesus is the Messiah. This dedication to Scripture

allowed him to argue the truth. Then in Acts 17:11-12 we see the Bereans also set an example by examining Scriptures to confirm Paul's teaching.

Third, we must learn from the collective wisdom of the Church, passed down to us. Ecclesiastes 1 expresses the similarity of experiences across generations. Thus Christian history is a source of the collective wisdom of God's people. During this pandemic, some use 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 to say God will remove this plague if we just repent, implying COVID-19 is God's judgment. But although all suffering stems from this sin-cursed world, and in His wisdom God allows suffering to occur, it isn't always for the purpose of judgment. Jesus said the blind man wasn't born this way because of sin, but so that God's glory would be shown through him. Those who confine God to such simplistic behavior treat Him as a means to get what they want rather than trusting in His wisdom. We should repent, but not just so that God will heal us. Let's look instead at what the Church historically did in times like this. In Acts 11:27-29, we see that they actively participated in God's work by sending relief to Christians in Judea during the famine. And in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christians cared for those ravaged by plague. Likewise many of you have donated masks and other protective equipment during this crisis, which is a step in the right direction. We can look to 2000 years of church history to see how they handled both similar and novel situations. This tradition is the living faith of the dead, which shouldn't be confused with traditionalism, the dead faith of the living. If properly assimilated, inherited tradition can give us discernment in the same way as do the exemplary figures in our lives.

Finally, we must practice and exercise everything we learned through Scripture and tradition. Hebrews 5:12-14 tells us that training through constant practice yields maturity. Though this is specifically about true and false teaching, but we may apply it to discernment in general. Discernment requires training. We must train ourselves to find reliable information, to look at things from different angles, even if contrary to our opinion. News today has become biased editorial monologue. It's easier to express opinion than to dig for the truth. We must learn to search for the truth of matters and address them with truth of Scripture. For example though Scriptural principles support justice for the oppressed, which the Black Lives Matter *movement* embodies, it doesn't necessarily support all the specific goals of the Black Lives Matter *organization*. Through these complex issues let's pray for growth in loving discernment to live with integrity and good works for the glory of God and Jesus our Savior.