

Principles for Discernment, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

TMC209

This week does provide an opportunity for me to have a little continuity with you all and I really cherish that, just kind of dropping in to do a chapel isn't nearly as helpful either to me, perhaps, or to you, as getting into a little bit of a flow. So that means I have to kind of pick a theme. And as I was thinking about what I might address this week in our chapels together, I just kind of asked myself the question, "What's the most important thing that I could address? What's the most important issue that's going to face us as we live out our Christian lives in this world?" given that we know the Lord Jesus Christ, given that we understand the theology of justification and sanctification and all of that. What do we really need to know?

And I thought that this is an educational institution, this is all about learning, this is all about gaining knowledge, a body of knowledge so that you are truly an educated person. But more than that, knowledge is only valuable if it becomes the driving compelling force in the choices that you make. It really is the height of folly to have a lot of knowledge and then make bad choices. So in the end, knowledge should lead to wisdom, particularly if knowledge encompasses the truth of God's Word, that should make a major contribution to the wisdom that you exhibit in the choices you make in life. And your life will be the byproduct of your choices. I mean, you'll go through life, you'll make choices. Making the right choices is critical, it's crucial. Making the wrong choice is obviously as critical in a negative sense.

Some of you are sort of sitting on the fence of a choice about whether to come back next semester or not. Obviously we would like to tell you what the wise choice is and that is to finish what you started, to believe that if God brought you here would have to be a compelling direction from God to lead you away. But life will become a series of choices.

What are the criteria for you to make the choices you need to make to assure that in the end you can look back over your life and be grateful for all the blessing of God that you've enjoyed. I want to help you with that a little bit.

Another way to approach the subject would be to ask the question, "What is the greatest need? People ask me this all the time, "What is the greatest need in the church today? What is the most compelling need? What do you see as the biggest problem in Christianity? The biggest problem in the church?"

It's simple for me to answer that. The biggest problem in the church today is the absence of discernment. It's a lack of discernment. It's the biggest problem with Christian people, they make bad choices. They accept the wrong thing. They accept the wrong theology. They are prone to the wrong teaching. They're unwise in who they follow, what they listen to and what they read.

I'll tell you a funny story that will set us on our course here to talk about discernment. It was a number of years ago, my son, Mark, who graduated from the college was signed to play baseball with the St. Louis Cardinals. And he said, "I don't know where they're going to assign me but would you bring me my car? Wherever I'm going to be I'm going to need my car, would you bring it to me?" And I thought, you know, Palm Springs, Arizona will be great. They assigned him to Savannah, Georgia and he had this little Honda that I was going to have to drive from here to Savannah, Georgia. But what's a father going to do? I said, "Sure, I'll bring you your car and I'll have it there when the season begins and you get there from Spring Training."

So I jumped in this little Honda and off I went, shifting my way through the five speeds. I finally arrived in Arkansas...I like Arkansas, I really do. And there was a pastor, I think it was a Sunday and I visited a church and the pastor said, "You're John MacArthur, I'd like to take you Bass fishing." And I said, "You know, I'm not a good fisherman, I'm sort of fisherman's round up, taking me fishing and everything dies, you just spray me on the fish and I don't do well." So we... "No, no, we'll catch a lot of bass." So he took me out bass fishing, we caught absolutely nothing after about five hours.

I got back in my car, by then it was just raining like crazy and I was back on my way to Savannah and I was putting along the country road going up and down these hills. I saw a little sign, one of those handmade wooden signs with the word "quilts" on it. And I thought, well I'm gone for a week doing this, maybe I could pick up a quilt for Patricia, she'd appreciate that. And she likes quilts and probably they're handmade and it would be kind of neat. So I took off this dirt road where the little arrow pointed "quilts" and I drove through the rain and the mud and I came to this shack, really just a shack with one of those flapping screen doors. And I jumped up on the porch in the rain and it was really dark inside and smoke-filled. And I kind of looked, like, you know, is there anybody here? And then I said, "Hello." And this voice from the inside comes back and says, "What do you want?" I said, "I wanna a quilt."

Well she came to the door, this lady with a few teeth. Fortunately they met which helps when you're eating, but she led me in and I walked in the door and I knew I was in for a bad situation and I said, "Well I saw the sign about the quilts and I just wondered if I could see some quilts." And then I looked to my left and I saw this man sitting in this huge overstuffed cheap recliner, all worn. And I don't know, he had been in there for years, I mean, he just was in there. And to his left were stacked all kinds of magazines and newspapers and to his right were videos and he had two TVs and two video machines. I mean, he might as well have been a statue. And he said, "My name's Johnny." He said, I said, "Well Johnny, you've got a lot of literature here." And I looked over and he had books by James Dobson and he had books by the Unity Fellowship, Unitarianism, he had Mormon stuff, he had Christian Science magazines. He had the Worldwide Church of God literature. He had Moody Press stuff. He had all kinds of stuff in this assortment. And I said, "You know, you have quite a mix of things here."

And I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Theres good in all of it...theres good in all of it." That is a lack of discernment, isn't it?

Then, all of a sudden, his wife says to me. "I have just the quilt for you." And she ran in the back, she said, "I made it myself." She ran in the back, she came out with the ugliest quilt you have ever seen. It was absolutely non-descript. It was no particular color or pattern. And I...you know, it's like when somebody shows you their homely baby, what are you going to say? That's...that is a baby.

So I didn't know what to say to this lady and so I said, "That is a quilt." She said, "I made it myself." And I had to think fast so I said, "Well, you know, it's just not the color I was looking for. And she said, "Well, it's got ever color in it." And I said, "No, I don't think I'd want that." And I thanked them and I left and I went out and I realized that she had quilted her husband's theology into that quilt, sort of metaphorically. That quilt was like a metaphor for her husband's eclectic theology. It was a whole bunch of nothing all sewn together that made no sense.

That's a little incident that sticks...by the way, I bought my wife a quilt somewhere else in Arkansas, it worked out fine, a blue one, you know, just blue. But I realized as I think back, it was like a sort of a symbolic experience, no discernment, no discrimination theologically and she had no discrimination in terms of beauty.

You know, so many people's lives are like that. They're just ugly quilts that make no sense, that have no rhyme or reason, just the bits and pieces of life all sewn together without any particular pattern. Indiscriminate.

I'm afraid that is pretty typical of the contemporary evangelical scene. There is a lack of precision in thinking, there's a lack of consistency, there's a lack of integrity. It's just a hodgepodge, listening to anybody and everybody, reading anything, making no particular judgments. In fact, to make a judgment may be seen as unchristian. Boundless, endless credulity, anything and everything except there's got to be good in all of it, how dare you question anybody's view on anything. And I really believe that because of this pervasive attitude, evangelical Christianity, biblical Christianity as we know it is fighting for its life. Amazing to think about.

But by the grace and intervention of God, the biblical Christianity that you and I know could go out of existence if left in the hands of the general evangelical consensus. So it seems to me that if any problem outstrips the other problems in the church. And if any problem outstrips the other problems in an individual Christian's life, this growing lack of spiritual discrimination is, in my judgment, the main issue. This is...this is really what is the death knell to biblical Christianity, bad decisions, faulty reasoning, superficial understanding, shallow knowledge, ignorance are contributing and always have contributed more anguish to the church than any persecution. I would rather the church be persecuted. I would rather Christians shed their blood than abandon their theology. I would rather see Christians crucified upside down than to have them let go of the truth of God in a constant environment of compromise. In fact, there's no question historically that the lack of discernment, discrimination, precision regarding the truth has cost the church far more than all the persecutions of the church combined. You show me a persecuted church and I'll show you a church that clings to tenacity to the truth. You show me an affluent, flourishing, comfortable church and I'll show you a church that easily abandons the truth.

Persecution has taken its toll on lives but it strengthens the church because it strengthens our grip on the truth. So I want to talk about this issue of discernment. And I'm not just talking sort of historically, although we'll look at that a little bit, I want to get it down eventually as we go through the week to our own practical lives.

Now just in general, if you look at the literature of the Bible really from the beginning to the end, the Lord makes it very clear that there are two things sort of available to us in the world. One is the truth

of God and the other is the lie of the enemy. So we live in a world where truth and lies are in constant conflict. And you get that all the way back in the book of Genesis where Satan comes to Eve and he says to Eve, "Did God really say this?" He's causing her to question what God said. And then he says, "You shall not surely die," which is to say God lied to you, God said you'd die, I'm telling you, you won't. And therein is the conflict framed up in its simplicity. God says one thing and Satan says another. So you have two systems working in the world, the truth and the lie.

Does it matter whether you sort that out? Does it matter whether you come to the truth or not? It does matter. It matters for your own life and it matters for the honor and the glory of God's truth and it matters for all the people that you influence that you influence them with the truth.

So, Scripture is filled with warnings about liars. God hates liars. God hates those who tell lies. God cannot lie, the Bible says. He always speaks the truth. He is truth. Satan is a liar. He is the father of lies. They all sort of generate out of his spiritual mind set. We then have to be able to discern between the truth and the lie with regard to everything that God has revealed to us. We are warned in Scripture about ear-tickling teachers who just want to give the feel-good message to us no matter whether it's truth or not. We're warned about doctrines of demons, demonic lies, destructive heresies, myths, perverse teachings, commandments of men rather than God. We're warned about speculations that lofty ideas raised up against the knowledge of God. We're warned about deceitful spirits. We're warned about worldly fables. We're warned about false knowledge, empty philosophy, science falsely so-called, traditions of men, worldly wisdom, corrupters and adulterers of the Word of God. We're warned about all of that. We're warned about the wolves in sheep's clothing who come along to devour us. They come as if they are prophets, they turn out to be destructive agents of Satan. I mean, we have these warnings all over the place in the New Testament. They're also everywhere in the Old Testament.

And to put it simply, there is a world of chaos and confusion out there and Satan is very adept and very clever and very powerful and very systematic in the structure of evil that is wrapped up in the system in which we live. Against that is pitted the truth of God. We have to be able to discern the difference.

If you understand the warnings of the Bible and you understand how critical it is that you know the truth, that you have discernment. You cannot be gullible. You cannot be sucked off into error without dishonoring God. God is truth. He is revealed truth. He loves truth. He has given you the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth. He's given you His Word which is truth. How terrible it is to think you might drift into lies. But people do it all the time, even people who sit in churches under very often weak teaching.

Let me give you an illustration of what we might be talking about. Turn to Matthew chapter 16. Matthew chapter 16, just a simple illustration comes in the first four verses here. The Pharisees and the Sadducees who never could get together on anything except their mutual hatred of Jesus, they hated each other and they wouldn't cooperate but they hated Jesus worse so they agreed to cooperate in assaulting Him. So they came up to Him and the reason they couldn't get along was the Pharisees were the hard-line fundamentalists and the Sadducees were the religious liberals and naturally the fundamentalists and the liberals don't get along well, but they did agree to assault Jesus. So, they came up as they often did, in testing Him, asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning there will be a storm today for the sky is red and threatening. Do you know

how to discern the appearance of the sky but cannot discern the signs of the times?”

What Jesus said to them was interesting. He said, “You're religious authorities, you're the religious elite and frankly, your primitive way of telling the weather is better than your spiritual discernment.” That's what He's saying. Shocking. You have a very limited knowledge of weather. But as simple and primitive as that is and not necessarily accurate, it's better than your theology. You cannot discern the signs of the times. What He means by that is you can't discern spiritual issues. You don't even know you're addressing the Messiah of God. You don't even understand that the Kingdom of heaven has come to you, you're unsophisticated weathermen but you're better at that than you are at your theology.

And so, this is the issue that I want to talk about a little bit, the ability to distinguish between the false and the true which is essential and possible for you as a Christian in order that you might make the right decision. Two passages that sort of set the frame for us. Go to the end of 2 Corinthians, for a moment, chapter 11...chapter 11. I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness, verse 1 of 2 Corinthians 11, and Paul obviously had a lot of problems with the Corinthian church. Repeatedly they failed to fulfill his hopes and desires for them, falling into all kinds of sinful patterns as well as believing false teachers. And here was his concern. Verse 2, “I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I am betrothed to you like a husband.” In other words, I have a relationship with you that's like a marriage and it's really a marriage not between myself and you but between you and Christ and I want to present you to Christ some day, you know, when you enter into His presence as a pure virgin. So I have this godly jealousy. I have linked you to Christ and I want to keep you pure until the time you meet Him. But I'm afraid, verse 3 says, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray.

That's what he was afraid of. He was afraid that their minds would be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Verse 4, “If someone comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, different than the Holy Spirit, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.” You tolerate it...another Christ, another gospel, another spirit and you don't have a problem with it. You lack discernment.

“My great fear, my great fear is this, that you will be led astray.” I can tell you as a pastor, I can tell you as a president, that's a great fear that I have for you. It's happened with people who have gone through the college and graduated and been led astray into some false teaching that dishonors God, some lies. And then it boils down too to the decisions you make day in and day out that effect the course of your life, manifesting discernment at that level is critical as well.

Now, I want to take you to the main passage that we're going to be dealing with 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians 5. Now this is a very important passage of Scripture. It's one of those really great summary passages in which the Apostle Paul pulls together like what you would call bullet points, basics of Christian living. Verse 16, “Rejoice always,” verse 17, “Pray without ceasing,” verse 18, “In everything give thanks,” verse 19, “Don't quench the Spirit.”

And then comes verse 20, 21 and 22, and that's where we want to focus. “Do not despise prophetic utterances.” That would be revelation from God. Do not despise God's revelation through spokesmen who speak for Him. But examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from every form of evil.”

Now this is virtually a call to discernment...a call to discernment. Let's go back and just kind of take the text apart. Verse 20, "Do not despise, do not downgrade," that's what that Greek word means. Do not make light of. Do not belittle. Do not treat as trivial or insignificant prophetic utterances, propheteos. What is propheteos? It is the gift of interpreting the divine will. It is the gift of interpreting divine purpose. It is the skill for the public proclaiming of God's Word.

What he's saying is, do not despise preaching, do not despise the presentation of the divine will.

Don't belittle preaching. We could say a few things about that in a day when preaching is often belittled. But he says don't belittle preaching, don't treat it lightly or trivially, don't downgrade it, though many people do that today. But while you're hearing preaching and while you're elevating propheteos, the gift of interpreting and proclaiming the divine will, do this, examine everything carefully. That's what that word means. Examine is dokimazo, very important Greek word. Very familiar word, by the way, to the students of the New Testament with language, used very often to refer to something that is tested, something that is tested very carefully so as to reveal its genuineness. Something that is subjected to scrutiny, analysis, sometimes it's used of testing metals to determine the degree of their purity. Test everything you hear. Be like the noble Bereans, he is saying, search the Scripture to determine whether these things in fact are so.

If you have had the opportunity to come to the Master's College and to be trained here, taught here, and go out of here, you ought to be a front-line person in terms of assaying what you hear, what other hear. You ought to be on the front line of discernment. You ought to be useful in the dokimazo process. Test everything to determine what's true. And, he says, what you find is good, cling to it, hold on to it.

On the other hand, verse 22, "Whatever comes across as evil, whatever its schema, whatever its form, the word abstain means to push it away from you. You have to be able to make that distinction. Precision is everything. Discernment is everything. I mean, if you were to go to the medical doctor and you are having severe headaches, debilitating headaches, you went to the doctor and the doctor said, "Well, it could be a lot of things. It could be a fatal brain tumor growing or it could be too much sugar, drinking too much soda pop. Or it could be just being out in the sun. But you're welcome to believe anything you want." That's not helpful. That's not helpful.

You can say, "Well I choose to believe that it's just being out in the sun, so I'll wear a hat, drink as much Coke as I want." That's not helpful. But the one thing you want to know is the truth about your condition. Why if we demand such precision to that regard do we not demand precision in the spiritual realm and in the interpretation of divine truth? Test everything.

It was said of King David, 2 Samuel 14:17, that he was able to discern good and evil. Paul said, "Learn what is pleasing to the Lord." It's the same thing. Hold on to what you determine is kalos, good is the word kalos. It doesn't mean good in the sense of beautiful, that's agathos, that's where the old name Agatha came from, it means beautiful. Agathos is something that has the appearance of goodness or the appearance which is desirable or lovely. Kalos is what is inherently noble, what is inherently true, what is inherently right and righteous and genuine.

So when you're listening to the preaching or when you're reading what's written, or when you're

hearing somebody espouse something, examine it carefully, put it to the test. And the test is always the Scripture, like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so. And when you determine that something is good, cling to it, grip it, clutch it. And, on the other hand, as I said, in verse 22, if it is not good, if it is evil in any form, the word literally means shun it, *aparta* is the prefix, hold it far away from you, separate yourself completely from it, don't sit under it, don't expose your mind to it. It has a corrupting influence. And evil, by the way, is always understood in an active sense. It's never something static. You can't ever play with evil as if it were something completely objective, something fixed, something static. Evil is always presented in Scripture as something malignant, something harmful, something working disaster, something growing, corrupting, defiling and influencing and injuring everything it touches. Evil is like poison. It is like an infectious disease, stay away from it like you would stay away from a plague. This is a call for discernment.

And Lenski, the New Testament commentator writes, "The worst forms of wickedness consist of perversions of the truth, spiritual lies." You know, I think that's really an important statement. "The worst forms of wickedness are the perversions of the truth, spiritual lies."

There are a lot of wickedness...elements of wickedness in the world. You can talk about sexual sin, you can talk about covetousness, you can talk about all the elements of materialism. You could talk about the horrors of war. You could talk about all of the terrible crimes. You could talk about abortion, whatever. Pick whatever category. I think he's right, THE worst form of wickedness that exists in the world is a perversion of truth, that's the worst.

So don't be guilty of that. And don't be sucked in by those who are guilty of it. And by the way, the word here, just for your filling out your knowledge on this, the word "form" is *eidos*, *eidos*. It simply means shape. Evil in any form, any shape, any appearance of any kind, any sort, any species, shun it. This is critical. Or you will be susceptible to being led astray, as we read in 2 Corinthians...yeah, 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

So this then is a call for discernment. And this is such a critical thing and I can't emphasize it too strongly, young people, your value to the Kingdom of God, your value as a Christian as one who serves Christ is going to be directly related to your discernment regarding the truth. Also, the blessedness, the productivity, the fruitfulness, the joy of your Christian life is going to be directly related to your ability to discern because that's going to aid you to make good choices.

So I say, when the church loses its ability to discern, it puts itself in a disastrous situation, absolutely disastrous. And I'll go back to what I said at the very beginning. I think evangelical, biblical Christianity is fighting for its life. And the reason it's fighting for its life is because it has lost its discernment. I can't even keep up with all the aberrations. I can't keep up with all the theological aberrations that are coming out of the Evangelical Movement, staggering to me.

Now with that sort of as a foundation, we're going to ask some questions this week and then we're going to get to the practical application regarding discernment. But let me start with an initial question that sort of fills out our thinking for this morning.

Why is there such a lack of discernment? It's obvious it's there, the question is why is it there? What has contributed to this? And simply, I'll give you the main contributor, is a weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction...it's a weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction. There were much better

times in the history of the church when Christians were encouraged to think, to think biblically, to think theologically, to think precisely, to search the Scriptures thoroughly, to distinguish carefully its truths. Churches weren't in the hands of pastors and leaders who didn't think deeply or clearly or precisely or carefully about the Word of God.

Theology will disappear in the hands of novices, that's very, very obvious. Especially in an environment where there's no real persecution. Today if you take a strong stand on a theological issue, you're criticized because I know I'm criticized quite frequently, pretty much routinely. In fact, one guy...I was introduced one time at the Booksellers Convention as John MacArthur, the guy who is much nicer in person than he is in his books. And the reason they say that is because when you take a position in a book that's definitive and says, "Here's the truth of God," that's not acceptable in the pluralistic, syncretistic tolerant environment that we live in now. You're criticized as a heresy hunter and all of those kinds of things.

One night Benny Hinn was on TBN and they got talking about me. And the question came up, "Well what would you do...what do you do about John MacArthur?," or something. And Benny Hinn's response was, "I would like to take my Holy Ghost machine gun and blow his brains out." That's a strange attitude, isn't it? I don't know what a Holy Ghost machine gun is but...that shows you how strongly affected error is by the truth.

I remember going to lunch when I wrote the book, *The Gospel According To Jesus*, a very well-known pastor took me to lunch and he said, "Your book is a problem, big problem." And I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah, it's divisive...it's dividing the body of Christ. It's a severe problem causing a huge division in the church."

And I said, "Well I think I'm aware of that. But...I said...can I ask you a question? Is it true? Is what I wrote true?" Because that's all I'm responsible for. I'm only responsible to teach the truth of God. Just because it creates chaos doesn't change my responsibility. Jesus came and he preached the truth and it killed Him, but it didn't change the fact that He preached the truth. Paul preached the truth and they killed him. All the Apostles preached the truth and they killed all but one of them and they exiled him to Patmos. It's just about the truth, that's all it's about.

And he said, "Well, I don't agree with you."

"Oh," I said, "the issue is you don't agree with me theologically, so we need to talk about that, you need to read the book." It's just about the truth. But when the superficial unity overpowers the role of the truth, you have obvious problems.

So the fact that there is this tolerance and this disdain for precision and doctrine and clarity in understanding the Word of God is not because people disagree when they've done the hard work in the text, it's because people who haven't done the hard work in the text want to be accepted in the mainstream of evangelicalism without anybody questioning what they believe. This is not an accident, believe me, because what Satan would want to do more than anything else is to become powerful in the church by getting the church not to make an issue out of a right interpretation of Scripture. Just tolerate everything and lack precision and conviction.

There is very little doctrinal clarity today...very little conviction about doctrine. I remember when I was

on Larry King, I couldn't believe my ears. I was on Larry King with Hathout, the Muslim and Deepak Chopra, the con-man, quasi-Hindu snake oil salesman who is taking money out of people's pockets. And then with an evangelical, the guy who wrote the Prayer of Jabez. And I'll never forget Larry King said to him, "Is God a Christian?" And he said, "No." I almost fell off my chair. No? What is God, a Buddhist? What is God, a Hindu? God is a Christian, God is Christ. How can you say that God is not a Christian?

And then he said, "God is the God of everybody." No He's not. Why did he say that? Cause he doesn't have any conviction. He probably wouldn't have said that if he was speaking here, but if your theology is that adaptable, then it's not a conviction. There's just really the death of clarity in doctrine and with the death of clarity comes the death of conviction.

And so, what we want to do as we go through our education here, certainly in your behalf, is to make sure you get your theology right and it comes right out of the Scripture.

There is a movement that slowed down now is the Vineyard Movement. The real architects of the Vineyard Movement, John Wimber and another guy in England, David Watson, they led the charge of relativism into the church, they really did. Certainly David Watson led the charge of relativism into the Church of England and partnered up with the Vineyard here. They were really some prime movers in the early years of sapping the church of its doctrinal confession and conviction. And this is what David Watson said. Now David Watson was an Anglican and this is what he said. "The reason I travel with a team...he has kind of a music praise team...the reason I travel with a team gifted as they are in the performing arts is that they are able to communicate the gospel much more effectively than I could with mere words."

What in the world does that mean? You can...you can communicate the gospel more effectively through performing arts than through words? God didn't give us a music video, He gave us a book. These are words and words demand precision. The reason God gave us a book is because printed material is frozen and that leads to evaluation, assessment, comparison, contrast, exegesis. It's there, it's unchanging. Not one jot or tittle will ever pass away of this eternal Word. There isn't any performing arts that are going to communicate the gospel more effectively than the words which God has given us.

And then he, David Watson, went on to criticize the Christian church. He said, quote; "Most churches rely heavily on the written Word and then they wonder why so few people find the Christian faith to be relevant."

So go back 30 years to the Vineyard Movement and you're going to find that they began to bring relativism into the church to replace the written Word with entertainment, performing arts because the Word couldn't convey the truth of God in a relative way...they say. They were really saying that relevant Christianity is not mental, it's not rational, not doctrinal, it's psychological, it's emotional, it's experiential, it's mystical.

So that's what we've got...experience, and emotion, and sort of Christian mysticism in the church without real doctrinal conviction. That's the first reason why discernment has disappeared cause if you don't have sound doctrine and you don't hold with all your passion to the conviction that those doctrines should bring to you, then you have no standard by which to discern anything cause you

have no fixed point by which to measure anything.

I have a doctrine that I believe with all my heart, it's the doctrine of the Trinity. So when somebody comes along and says God is not three in one, I say that's a lie, right? I have a doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ that says He is the God/Man so when the Gnostics come along and say Jesus is a created emanation that descended from God down the long chain of emanations and is an elevated angel, I say that's a lie because I understand the Bible teaches that He is God.

The Bible teaches the doctrine of justification. If somebody comes along and writes a book and say you can be saved without ever hearing the gospel, or you can be saved by believing in Jesus Christ, not necessarily believing in the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, I say that's not true, that's a lie. I don't care who said that, I don't care who wrote that. That's contrary to the truth which is established in Scripture.

So the point is, you can't even have discernment unless you have the fixed standard. That's why it's absolutely critical that you know theology. Look, theology...the theology that has come down to us from the Word of God has been protected and preserved and fought for, for millennia. Here we are fighting for it today, no different than any other time. They've been fighting for it, the Christians who believe the truth, for two thousand years fighting to hold on to this, earnestly contending for the faith, preserving, protecting, guarding the faith. And it comes down to us intact. Then we've got this willy-nilly superficial kind of quasi-Christianity floating around that doesn't want to say anything for sure. And that's how you lose the faith all together.

So, you have to stand where the Bible is crystal-clear on these issues. That's the fixed points. They don't change, they don't move. And by that, you begin to measure. And then you go from there to matters of sanctification and matters even of discerning the will of God and matters of sin and righteousness and you know exactly what the Bible teaches. You know exactly what the Bible teaches about divorce. You know what the Bible teaches about issues like abortion, homo-sexuality, fornication, pre-marital sex. You know what the Bible teaches about cheating, about covetousness, about materialism. You know all of those things, those are fixed in the Word of God with unmistakable clarity. They have to then become convictions and against the plumb line of those great truths you make choices. Then you have discernment. If you don't affirm those doctrines, then you can't be discerning whatsoever.

So if we're going to be discerning, we have to start with a conviction about sound doctrine. That's why in this institution, the entire faculty agreed on a doctrinal statement, the most lengthy one of any Christian college that I know of in America because that's the standard by which everything is then discerned. I thank God for the faculty from all the various places they've come, they agree completely on these great truths, not because I told them to or our administration told them to, but because they're reading the same Bible. That's where discernment starts.

Well, more on Wednesday. We'll leave it at that point for today.

Father, we are again aware of the fact that we wouldn't know anything unless You told it to us. And how human wisdom leads us nowhere, the world by wisdom knows not You. Where is the wise man? Where's the scribe? He can't on his own come to any true knowledge so therefore he's comfortable with just opinions. But we have come to know the truth, the truth revealed in Your Word. And may we

take that truth and may we learn and even master that truth to the degree that You've revealed it in Scripture so that it becomes the fixed framework, the plumb line against which all issues are discerned and measured. May we be people of the truth which truth then provides our doctrine, our conviction and guides the choices we make as we live our lives to Your eternal glory. We ask these things in Your Son's name. Amen.

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