

The Imperative of Discernment

by G. Richard Fisher



The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel was given a mandate from God that he was to pass on to the leaders of the nation:

“And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23).

The leaders were themselves to be discerning, and then teach the people to be discerning. If the nation was going to be God’s nation, its people had to discern.

The Apostle Paul thought discernment was very important. He told the believers in Philippi:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:9-10).

Approving or disapproving of teachings requires that we discern what is being taught. So Paul prays that all believers might abound in discernment. The word “abound” means to go beyond the ordinary.

Commenting on the phrases “that your love may abound” and “ap-

prove the things that are excellent,” Roy Laurin wrote:

“Possessed of such love the Christian would acquire a moral discernment which enables him to judge between right and wrong, truth and error. Where there is real love there is a deep moral sensitiveness. Love provides its own defenses against defection. A fully developed love means the highest development of personality which in turn means maturity. With maturity comes discernment and with discernment these Philippians would ‘remain untainted by error, un stumbling amidst obstacles.’”¹

So we see that Christian maturity depends on our exercising discernment. Our physical and spiritual health — and maybe even our lives — depends on it.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DISCERNMENT

K. Neill Foster wrote:

“A.W. Tozer was fond of saying that the greatest need in the church was for the gift of discernment. And Dr. Tozer spoke from his perspective in the middle of the twentieth century.

Were he able to comment on today’s religious confusion, I am sure his tones would be more strident, his concerns still deeper. It is certainly clear to Christian leaders everywhere that confusion is increasing. There seems to be a famine of clear thought and penetrating insight.”²

One example is a quote in the *Los Angeles Times* by Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena:

“Some are unhappy with me because I have gone on record as saying that [Mitt] Romney’s church, the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not a cult. ... I have studied and taught about cults for many years. I have also spent the last dozen years meeting with Mormons — scholars and church leaders — to engage in lengthy theological discussions. ... Based on these conversations and my own careful study, I do not believe Mormonism is a cult.”³

Other Christian leaders may also wish to sidestep labeling Mormonism a cult because they think it is a “loaded” term. However, if Mormonism with its salvation by works, its heretical views of God, and its extra-

biblical books is not a cult, then the word “cult” has lost all meaning. Bill McKeever, founder and director of Mormonism Research Ministry, doesn’t agree with those who think the word “cult” needs to be retired.

And Christians have the biblical mandate to expose false teachers and their teaching (Titus 1:11; Ephesians 5:11). Romans 16:17 urges us to have nothing to do with those who would teach contrary to the apostles’ doctrine. Paul, in verse 18, says they do not serve Christ.

DISCERNMENT IS A BIBLE WORD

To many the word “discernment” is an offensive word. However, the writers of Scripture were quite comfortable with it. The Apostle Paul calls it a gift from God in 1 Corinthians 12 and urges its use. The words “discernment” and “discern” are used about 25 times in the New Testament. Other closely associated words such as “judge,” “test,” “try,” and “evaluate” are also used repeatedly.

Discernment is a gift that has fallen on hard times and is rejected and maligned in some circles. In Acts 17:11-12, the Bereans were called noble because they scoured the Scripture to be sure that their teacher Paul was on track. F.F. Bruce, along with the Scriptures, commends the Berean spirit:

“For, with commendable open-mindedness, they brought the claims made by Paul to the touchstone of Holy Writ instead of giving way to prejudice. Their procedure, ‘examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so’ (RSV), is worthy of imitation by all who have some new form of religious teaching pressed upon their acceptance.”⁴

STICKS AND STONES

Now Bereans are addressed by other names and even threatened with death, disease, and a “Holy Ghost machine gun.” It is not uncommon for PFO to receive phone calls from hostile callers because they have come across a *Quarterly Journal* article which examines a teacher or author to whom

they have expressed an impassioned devotion. We have been “damned to hell” and told to “repent” for our evaluations. Apparently it is permissible for these callers to judge our salvation, but we are not afforded the opportunity to judge the doctrine and practice of their spiritual guides. Author Dave Hunt has often remarked that such people should more properly be angry, not at the one exposing the false teaching, but rather at the false teachers themselves for their lies, deception, and heretical doctrine. Those exercising discernment, and even doing it with great love, are often written off as mean-spirited, judgmental, hard-nosed, and critical.

Gnostic researcher James Robinson, back in the 1970s, coined the term “Heresy Hunters.” In 1993, James Spencer used that phrase for the title of his book that castigated PFO and other discernment ministries for their critiques of Benny Hinn and other Word-Faith proponents. What Robinson and Spencer did not realize is that the cliché was incorrect because heresy need not be hunted; it is out in the open. It is proclaimed from church pulpits, stocked on the shelves of both secular and “Christian” bookstores, and fills the airwaves via “Christian” television and radio.

The very latest term and epithet for those who would want to discern truth is “the critique police.” Nevertheless, the mandate and imperative to judge between good and evil — Hebrews 5:14 — still stands! Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is central to discernment. It is, in fact, the “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Our present Church culture reflects the attitudes that were prevalent in Isaiah’s time when people were calling “evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).

Let’s therefore consider and emphasize crucial points about discernment.

THE FACT OF DISCERNMENT

The word “discernment” in all its forms and Greek nuances means to investigate, to look into, to scrutinize,

question, examine, or to put on trial. It means to determine the good or bad of a person or thing. The Greek word *kritikos* means to critique, to judge, to evaluate and decide, and even pass judgment. As a judge uses the law as his basis of evaluation, believers use the Word of God as the ultimate court of appeal. It is the Word of God that discerns us. This is why men such as Joel Osteen are appalling and Paul is appealing. When the Corinthians refused to judge sin in their church, the apostle argued, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (1 Corinthians 6:2). Here we are commanded to discern and judge.

Someone has coined the phrase, “The pathology of sentimentality.” It is a state of mind where we believe that we have to keep everybody happy by agreeing with them on everything. We can’t rock any boat, not even a little, and we cannot disagree with false teaching or try to correct error. Yet Jesus, in Matthew 10:34-36, said:

“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

At times, truth divides no matter how hard we try to present it with meekness, love, and respect. But there must be a separation between truth and error, light and darkness. “And what communion has light with darkness? ... what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” Paul asks in 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 16.

Preaching does not always alleviate or solve problems. There may be times when exposition from the pulpit stirs or creates problems, even when we deeply would like to avoid them or not have it so.

In real life we are constantly discerning things. We discern between a one dollar bill and a ten dollar bill. We discern at the pharmacy and are

sure we are not taking the wrong medication. We discern at home and make sure we keep detergents from being mixed with food. If we have young children we are constantly discerning for them what is right and what is wrong. Life could not be lived without constant discernment and choices. We need it no less for spiritual matters.

THE FICTION OF "MANY CHRISTIANITIES"

Some, such as Gnostic champions Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels, would have us believe that we really do not know what to believe because the Church of the first four or five centuries was a swirl of contradictory and competing variations of Christianity. There was, in fact, only one true Christianity and many heresies. However, Ehrman, Pagels, and others like them try to reconstruct early Church history in a totally different way. They argue that those with the most money, power, and clout won out. They maintain that it was the overwhelming power plays of the Orthodox that made the day, not truth. But that is just not so. The early Church, fiercely persecuted by the Romans, had no power, money, or clout — only grace and truth. The early martyrs had no power, money, or clout — only God's Word. Truth prevailed plain and simple. The truth of the Bible won the day. The heresies trying to compete with the truth were thoroughly trounced.

All throughout the New Testament there is a pattern of orthodox doctrine. It is called the "apostles' doctrine" in Acts 2:42. Paul often refers to it as "the faith," as does Jude who said it to be "the faith once delivered." This pattern of orthodox doctrine was then encapsulated in creeds and held in tact for 2000 years. Read those who succeeded the Apostles. Read the early apologists. True Christianity held the fort, not against competing Christianities, but against competing heresies.

DISCERNMENT BEGINS EARLY

Another sad fact is that discerners often think they have to discern only full-blown error in its grossest forms

and overlook or ignore the small detours that can lead to all-out heresy. But we must discern error and false teaching even in its earliest forms and its faint beginnings. People oftentimes do not rush into error; they wander there. Proverbs 4 talks about the very early beginnings of sin and false teaching when it says, "Do not enter the path of the wicked ... Avoid it ... Turn away from it and pass on" (vv. 14-15). Don't enter that path; don't even go there — don't even start because of where it ultimately leads. In verse 27 of the same proverb we are told, "Do not turn to the right or the left." Whenever people tell us that "God told them" rather than "the Scripture says," red flags should go up all over the place. When we hear of people journaling their inner voices more red flags should fly. And when we hear talk of added books to the Bible, even more red flags need to be raised. In many instances our red flags have been replaced by white ones.

OFF THE DEEP END

John MacArthur details a television appearance by Richard Eby who claims to have visited heaven:

"He said that the human brain has twelve cranial nerves and then added that those twelve nerves represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Further, he explained that the primary nerve in God's cranium is the sense of smell. Eby said he learned that the whole purpose of sacrifices was to send a sweet aroma up to heaven to satisfy God's main cranial nerve."⁵

There are two major problems with Eby's declaration. First is that research shows we have 24 cranial nerves: 12 pair. Second, and more important, is the blatant unbiblical intention that Eby ascribes to the Old Testament sacrifices. MacArthur tells us:

"As for the sweet aroma of sacrifices, Dr. Eby betrayed a complete misunderstanding of the biblical sacrifice system. The major feature of sacrifices was the death of the animal, not the

smell of the burning flesh (cf. Heb. 9:22)."⁶

Both MacArthur and William Alnor, who cataloged numerous near-death experiences and visions of heaven in his book *Heaven Can't Wait*, report that Eby claims the cause of his purported trip to heaven was a two-story fall from a balcony onto his head.⁷ Perhaps that is the one specific reported by Eby that can be believed.

It is helpful for MacArthur to explain modern-day mysticism for us:

"Mysticism is a system of belief that attempts to perceive spiritual reality apart from objective verifiable facts. It seeks truth through feelings, intuition, and other internal senses. Objective data is usually discounted, so mysticism derives its authority from within. Spontaneous feeling becomes more significant than objective fact. Intuition outweighs reason. An internal awareness supersedes external reality. ... mysticism is at the heart of modern existentialism, humanism, and even many forms of paganism — most notable Hinduism and its close ally, New Age philosophy."⁸

A preacher once said in jest: "I was dreaming one time that I was preaching and when I woke up, I was." While that witticism was designed to catch people's attention, there are intelligent people who have become so mired in mysticism and the bizarre that they believe the late Kenneth Hagin when he said that he, at times, left his body while preaching. He claimed to be able to bilocate into not only a different place, but to a different day and time. Here is Hagin's own description of an episode which supposedly occurred while he was preaching at his church:

"Sunday morning as I was preaching, suddenly that glory cloud came in and enveloped me! I couldn't see a person. I couldn't see anything in the congregation. Again, I could hear the sound of my voice, but I couldn't distinguish a single word I said. I don't know what I

said, but I was just preaching away. I looked at my watch and marked the time. I was in that glory, and suddenly I was gone! Right in the middle of my sermon, I found myself standing along a street in a little town fifteen miles away — and I knew it was Saturday night. ... Suddenly I heard the sound of my voice, and then the cloud lifted. I was standing behind my pulpit. I didn't know what to say, because I didn't know what I had been saying, so I just said, 'Everyone bow your head,' and we prayed. I looked at my watch, and again I'd been gone about fifteen minutes in the cloud."⁹

With similar and insane assertions as above, bodies all over his congregation should have been relocating. Yet, apparently, throughout his life and ministry, few of Hagin's followers ever got up and walked out in protest of such declarations.¹⁰

Without discernment error proliferates. Paul charges Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you've heard from me." The theme song today seems to be, "I will go where my false teacher leads me, and I will swallow whatever he feeds me." The fact of discernment is replete in Scripture and used to be what we call common sense.

FAILURES IN DISCERNMENT

A lack of discernment can be fatal. People have died when they discarded needed medicine on the advice of a faith healer who had declared them well. More than 900 people died in Jonestown, Guyana, because they followed Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones. Members of the Heaven's Gate cult died when they allowed Marshall Applewhite to do their thinking for them. More than 80, including 25 children, perished when they pledged allegiance to David Koresh and his Branch Davidian cult. Babies have died when parents withheld blood transfusions as a result of giving their minds to the Watchtower organization or withheld other vital medical treatment because a leader like faith-

formula teacher Hobart Freeman told them to.

To illustrate just how far down into darkness an undiscerning mind can go, we can learn about a man known as Padre Pio. Padre Pio was a Capuchin Monk who lived in an obscure town in southern Italy in the early 1900s. He claimed many powers, including levitation, bilocation, and stigmata (which is the bleeding from his hands, feet, and side like Jesus on the cross). While scientists of his day stated the wounds were self-created with the use of iodine and acid, Pio's followers thought of him as Jesus reincarnated. Pio was revered as hundreds flocked to his small town. Author Sergio Luzzatto has written about Pio's life and shares one shocking and unbelievable outcome:

"The prefect was also asked to guarantee that in light of the arriving droves of believers, the police were taking measures to deal with those exploiting this 'lurid industry,' and doing something to ensure public health — for many pilgrims from towns 'infected with smallpox and perhaps also with typhus,' and when the faithful gathered around Padre Pio, himself ill with tuberculosis, 'they gathered up his bloody sputum.'"¹¹

TRICKY DIVERSIONS AND EVASIONS

At times we fail to discern because we are put off and outmaneuvered by clichés, such as, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." But no one should believe that someone teaching false doctrine is the Lord's anointed. Specifically, "anointed" in the Old Testament refers to kings and priests and in the New Testament to true Christians. All true believers possess the Holy Spirit and are referred to as anointed (1 John 2:27).

We also are often put off when we hear, "Well, they teach the essentials." That is exactly what Jesus faced with the Pharisees: essentials buried under a pile of tradition. It was Paul who used the word "manure" in writing to the Philippians (3:8) as he spoke of his

past and his being mired in Pharisaic traditions. It is a problem when the cult or aberrant teacher thinks the non-essentials are essential.

Many books and articles written by proclaimed evangelical authors must have obligatory quotes from Catholic mystics without a single warning or disclaimer. Given the fact that some otherwise sound teachers tip their hats to these mystics, one may wonder if some of these have been added by editors. Perennial favorites seem to be Teresa of Avila and Madame Guyon. The quotes are often benign, but they just have to be there in the interest of ecumenism and no doubt a wider marketing base and bigger sales. Philip Yancey is a prime example of one who frequently does this indiscriminate quoting. When asked why Moody Press continues to publish the writings of Madame Guyon, a representative said, "It sells."

It does not seem to matter how much error or false teaching is spawned by the medieval mystics. Quoting them is just the "in thing" to do. It is tragic because it promotes so much confusion and doctrinal ambiguity. Certainly there must be safer and better authors who could be cited. But it is one of the weaknesses of our time as we try to make everyone happy. The theme song of megachurch pastor and author Joel Osteen seems to be Bobby McFerrin's 1988 number one pop hit, "Don't Worry Be Happy." Yet, happiness must not be our main priority. It can be a byproduct, but not a pursuit. Just seeking happiness is one of the signposts which points to a gross lack of discernment; a horrible failure in discernment. Holiness, not happiness, is God's primary goal for us. Getting there is sometimes a hard, difficult road. James 4:9 says we have to mourn and weep at times to make real progress. Hebrew 12 says we may have to endure chastisement to really enjoy the fruit of righteousness.

GETTING TO THE ROOT

The word "heresy" (Gr: *hairesis*) means to look away from truth and choose something else. Maybe that

something else is happiness at the expense of truth, or peace at the expense of truth. Second Peter 2:1 says that looking away from sound doctrine about Jesus to something else is destructive.

In *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* it is clearly admitted that what is called the Charismatic movement 'has always been strong on faith-affirmation and short on critical reflection. ... But while the need for discernment is widely recognized, charismatic discernment is mostly intuitive and generally lacks an adequate underlying theology ... intelligent faith challenges the naiveté and simplistic identifications of unusual phenomena with the divine or the demonic.'¹²

THE "MAD" MAGAZINE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

Then, thanks to *Charisma* magazine and its book publishing division, we have books like Bill Wiese's *23 Minutes in Hell*, a piece of fiction borrowed from Mary K. Baxter's *Divine Revelation of Hell*. Hell used to be eternal, now it is a place one can apparently just visit for — more or less — 23 minutes. Today, visits to heaven and hell are a dime a dozen and these books all contradict one another. *Charisma* magazine also advertises other titles such as *Angels in our Lives* and *Dream Language: The Prophetic Power of Dreams*, as well as publishes articles to help us do violent warfare prayers. One may wonder if, when looking through a *Charisma* magazine, they are reading a Christian publication or something produced by the SyFy Channel.

THE FAILURE OF THE "PROFESSIONAL" DISCERNERS

What is really disconcerting is when the professional discerners are not discerning. There can be, at times, an abysmal lack of discernment even among apologists. They give accolades to people they have not even researched. This creates even more confusion. When the issue is brought up, they reply, "Well, I don't agree

with everything they say." Many times, when pressed on what they don't agree with, one will find they have never read those they have quoted, but only taken something from a quote book because of the popularity of the cited author.

In November 1947, Israel received a 33-13 affirmative vote from the United Nations to form a State. However, truth is not up for vote. Even the most popular apologists should not get a "pass" because they write more books or have more listeners. The size of one's following cannot determine truth. If that was so, Islam would have Christianity beat hands down.

It is frustrating to have an organization like the Christian Research Institute (CRI) "baptize" the Worldwide Church of God, declaring it a first-rate, fully orthodox Christian organization when its leaders have yet to disavow Herbert Armstrong or label him the heretic, false teacher, and false prophet he was. Armstrong's church was also given the seal of approval in the late 1990s by both disgraced pastor Ted Haggard's school and Fuller Theological Seminary.

In 2009, Worldwide Church of God leaders changed the organization's name to Grace Communion International. On its Web site its history is published and Herbert Armstrong is presented as one who accepted Christ, and became a true Christian, but was a bit off on some of his interpretations and a bit misled. They admit he taught "unusual" doctrines and had "unusual" conclusions, but never call them heretical or wrong, just "unusual." So there is faint admission that many of his doctrines were a bit off the mark. However, the word "unusual" merely neutralizes outright heresy. Armstrong himself taught that God spoke to him and as he listened he wrote these words down in his articles. These teachings were given by direct revelation, or so Armstrong said. If so, then his errors must be God-given. The best that the Grace Communion International will do is say that he made some interpretive mistakes.

What is further troubling is that on Grace Communion International's Web site they also have available, both in their library and online, over a dozen of Herbert Armstrong's books with no disclaimers.

TOMORROW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

In addition, Grace Communion International still openly teaches post-mortem salvation, that one can be saved after death. In a type of quasi-universalism, GCI teaches that everyone will have a chance to hear the Gospel and respond after death. PFO sent a letter to GCI regarding the group's continued adherence to this belief. The response included a variety of spurious reasons for believing and teaching this. Their Web site includes an interpretation of John 3:16 that makes it a future event:

"The verse says nothing about that belief having to come prior to physical death. In fact, it says that believers will not perish, and since even believers die, it should be obvious that 'perish' and 'die' are not the same thing. Belief keeps people from perishing, but it does not keep them from dying."¹³

Also posted on GCI's Web site is an article that states:

"To summarize, it is the position of the church that God will make fair and just provision for people who do not appear to have received the gospel in this life. That was the main point of what we used to teach. But we do not teach any dogmatic *timing* or program — the when or how — regarding the receiving of the grace to salvation by those who seem to be among the unevangelized."¹⁴

This same article declares:

"The church's statement on 'Eternal Judgment' in its *Statement of Beliefs* says the following on this important matter: At the end of the age, God will gather all the living and the dead before the heavenly throne of Christ for judgment. The righteous will re-

ceive eternal glory, and the wicked will be condemned to the lake of fire. In Christ the Lord makes gracious and just provision for all, even for those who at death appear not to have believed the gospel."¹⁵

So the erstwhile followers of Armstrong provide a weak argument to prove postmortem salvation, using distorted verses, while ignoring others such as Hebrews 9:27, which says, "It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment."

Likewise excluded is 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Today is the day of salvation." Nowhere in Scripture will one find a "you can wait until you die" soteriology.

More than a decade ago, PFO dealt with this issue in an extensive article written by a former member of the Worldwide Church of God.¹⁶ In that article Peter Ditzel wrote:

"This teaching — often called postmortem evangelization — is certainly not the teaching of historic, orthodox Christianity. [WCG official J. Michael] Fezell himself verifies this by labeling the orthodox doctrine, 'the strange but common belief among many Christians that all people who do not accept the Gospel before they die are eternally lost and without hope.' This labeling of orthodox teaching as 'strange' is sadly reminiscent of Herbert W. Armstrong's invectives against the Christian Church. It is also paradoxical at best for the WCG, which has claimed for several years that it is completely orthodox in its teachings."¹⁷

GETTING HELL OUT OF THE BIBLE

Grace Communion International also makes the claim on its Web site that hell is "Not a Core Doctrine":

"Hell is a doctrine about which there is no clear and dogmatic teaching in Scripture. ... The doctrine of hell evolved long after the core doctrines of the historic Christian faith were established.

The views of the early Church fathers about hell were far from unanimous. It took the Christian community hundreds of years to come up with a consensus on the issue. The majority view — that hell is a place of eternal fiery torment — emerged only after a long debate within the Church."¹⁸

Yet the serious Bible student would argue that hell is "core." It is used more than 50 times in the Bible. Further, it was especially "core" and important to Jesus because He taught so much about it — and no words of Jesus can ever be minimized or dismissed. This setting aside of hell impinges on the entire doctrine of salvation and the Gospel. Jesus came to earth to deliver us from eternal punishment. That was His reason for coming. Eternal separation from God is not peripheral in the teachings of Jesus — rather it is central to His entire mission. It is what drives evangelism. It is through this created knothole that GCI has smuggled in the concept of postmortem salvation. For GCI, hell is not all that important and not a "core" issue because there will be a post-death opportunity to be saved anyway.

KREEFT CRAFTING HERESY

In his book, *Resurrection - The Capstone in the Arch of Christianity*, CRI president Hank Hanegraaff repeatedly quotes Roman Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft. Kreeft is far removed from Orthodoxy. Hanegraaff offers more than a dozen quotes by Kreeft favorable to his position.¹⁹ It is sad and misleading. It gives Kreeft credibility. Unfortunately, Hanegraaff only provides within an endnote in the back of his book, a brief disclaimer alluding to Kreeft's unorthodoxy.²⁰

Kreeft, in his book *Ecumenical Jihad*, says very clearly, "We worship the Eucharist because it is Christ."²¹ True to his Roman Catholic foundation, Kreeft instructs believers to worship a "consecrated" piece of bread.

Kreeft also tells his readers that while writing that book he had an out-of-body experience and that he was "commanded" to tell them about

what happened to him. He alleges, "Woe is me if I do not preach this gospel."²² Then, concerning his experience, he offers:

"Whether it was real or unreal, objective truth or subjective fantasy, I cannot say. All I can say is that it was certainly truer, incomparably truer, than the chapter I was planning to write. That's why I threw the old one away."²³

Nevertheless, we are to believe the revision will be truer than his first draft. Additionally, we would logically think that we are going to hear the Gospel. His "gospel" message tells of his out-of-body vision in which he was soul surfing on a heavenly beach in a tunnel of light.²⁴ Here, in heaven, he encountered Confucius (also on a surf board) and explains that Confucius taught him some things about wisdom, virtue, and social justice.

Next Buddha shows up leading Kreeft to conclude that Buddha had received a theological crash course in heaven. So now we have both Confucius and Buddha in heaven. Buddha actually affirmed the truth of "doing by not doing" and teaching Kreeft interior silence, detachment, and meditation. He then realized that Buddha's words were "God's words." God confirmed to him that Buddha's words were indeed God's words.

Then God told Kreeft another man would show up to teach him wisdom. That man was Mohammed. Kreeft says he took out his rosary and Mohammed fell on his knees worshipping Jesus and Mary. Not to be completely removed from Scripture, Kreeft encounters yet another — this one a man with the appearance of a New York Jew with an obvious lower east side New York accent: Moses.

Kreeft's out-of-body experience is a cross between mockery and insanity.

FULLY EMBRACING DISCERNMENT

In the biblical world, and up until recent times, people thought in terms of contrasts. There was good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan,

hope and despair, morality and immorality, black and white.

Logic and the Bible both tell us that this is the proper way to understand life and reality. It's built into the fabric of creation, "God divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:3). Discernment is necessary to see all the differences that are in the world.

HARDENING OF THE CATEGORIES

It appears that many no longer see light and darkness, good and evil as contrasts. The mind-set today is that everything is relative. Thus we can see why our culture is in such deep trouble. Yet there is still visceral dislike for child abuse and molestation, as well as murder. The same goes for rape. No one argues that these are acceptable for some, although that argument may not be far off. The dividing line for some seems to be that if it hurts another person it is not permissible. God has defined for us what is hurtful. And even though we may one day try to redefine hurt and decide that the person being sinned against must be more accepting of these behaviors, God's Word still stands. God help us to have a revival of the gift of discernment and understand life through biblical contrasts.

So without discernment we would not know right from wrong. It is obvious that the Fall has dulled and distorted that God-given ability, so it must be sharpened by God's Word.

There can be extremes in discernment. No one needs to be excessively critical, but neither are believers to go to the other extreme and be naive and afraid to evaluate anything. We are not to be judgmental Pharisees, but neither are we to be like the Athenians (in Acts 17:19-32) who spent their time hearing and telling something new. Remember, as has been stated, discernment is first and foremost a gift from God. We can exercise that gift in a God-pleasing manner.

Another word that courses through the Bible is "understanding." Proverbs 1:2 says we are to "perceive the

words of understanding." Proverbs tells its readers to gain understanding by knowing and applying the wisdom found therein. "Understanding" is a word that is distinct from feeling and means to perceive with the mind. We are starting down the wrong road when we separate mind and heart or mind and feelings, setting them up as enemies or exclusive of one another. Discernment is a light for both our mind and our emotions, lest they both go out of control and head down the wrong road.

SLIPPING, SLIDING, AND AVOIDING

We often hear what can be referred to as "discernment evasions." The diversion goes like this: "Well you know you can denounce false teaching, but you should never name names." However, in 3 John 9-10 the Apostle John says, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words." That word "prating" means that Diotrephes talks nonsense. John named names.

Throughout the book of Acts false teachers are named. Paul in his Epistles names names. He speaks of babblings that lead to ungodliness and "their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort" (2 Timothy 2:17).

In 2 Timothy 3:8, Paul wrote, "Janenes and Jambres resisted Moses." A chapter later he wrote, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Then a few verses later he wrote, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works" (v. 14). Paul was even bold enough to denounce Peter for his allegiance to the circumcision group (Galatians 2:11-14).

Some individuals and organizations, mostly within Charismatic and Pentecostal camps, make claims of apostolic succession, meaning some type of hierarchal passing down of power and authority to them. Acts 2:42,

however, indicates it happens another way. Luke wrote that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Continuance in the apostles' doctrine is the only way to insure a vital connection to the truth that the apostles conveyed. F.F. Bruce says it well:

"... those are most truly in the apostolic succession who receive this apostolic teaching, along with the rest of Holy Writ, as their rule of faith and practice."²⁵

Proverbs 2:3-5 teaches, "Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God." It is clear that we should pray to be more discerning.

Recall Philippians 1:9-10: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Jesus, in Matthew 7:15, instructs us to "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Paul charges the believers in Thessalonica to "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Apostle John adds, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Some act like those verses are not even there. Jude said he wrote "exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

"Earnestly" means "diligently." Dallas Seminary theology professor Robert P. Lightner, during his plenary lecture at one of PFO's discernment conferences, challenged believers to contend for the faith without being contentious.²⁶ To that we could add that you cannot contend without being earnest.

It is essential that we read and consider Acts 20:26-32. In those verses Paul warns that false teachers would infiltrate the Ephesian church — both from outside and inside. The heretical teachers would mislead and speak perverse things, divide the flock, and carry off misguided followers. By extension, leaders in the Church are commanded to really be on guard. All of this demands discernment. It is not a “do it if you feel like it” exercise.

Ponder the imperative of discernment — its facts — its failures — and your responsibility to fully embrace it.

Endnotes:

1. Roy Laurin, *Philippians - Where Life Advances*. Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing, 1954, pg. 31.
2. K. Neill Foster, *The Discerning Christian*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1981, pg. 11.
3. Richard J. Mouw, “Mormonism: Not a cult, not a problem,” Op-Ed in *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 20, 2011. Document accessed at: www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mouw-mormons-20111120,0,699207.story.
4. F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1955, pg. 347.

5. John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, pg. 30.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 31.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 30 and William M. Alnor, *Heaven Can't Wait*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996, pg. 47. Alnor provides a good critique of Eby's book, *Caught Up into Paradise*, on pages 46-50.
8. *Charismatic Chaos*, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
9. Kenneth E. Hagin, “The Glory of God,” *The Word of Faith* magazine, October 1986, pg. 17. This two-part article was later (in 1987) printed in booklet form.
10. For additional information on the claims of Hagin, see J. Greg Sheryl with M. Kurt Goedelman, “The Visions and Voices of Kenneth E. Hagin,” *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2005, pp. 1, 18-24.
11. Sergio Luzzatto, *Padre Pio*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010, pg. 30.
12. P.D. Hocken in Stanley M. Burgess, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002, pg. 517.
13. “The Gospel Really Is Good News,” Grace Communion International Web site. Document accessed at: www.gci.org/gospel/realis.
14. “Are There Three Resurrections?,” Grace Communion International Web site, italic in original. Document accessed at: www.gci.org/bible/rev/3resurrec.

15. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
16. Peter Ditzel, “Being Saved After Death is Still Alive in the Worldwide Church of God,” *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2001, pp. 1, 11-20.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 1.
18. “The Battle Over Hell,” Grace Communion International Web site. Document accessed at: www.gci.org/prophesy/hell.
19. Hank Hanegraaff, *Resurrection - The Capstone in the Arch of Christianity*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, pp. 66, 70, 72, 116, 117, 121, 122, 139, 140, 141, 142, 238.
20. In his endnote, Hanegraaff concedes: “While I have significant theological differences with both [C.S.] Lewis and Kreeft, I greatly admire their writing prowess, mental acumen, and philosophical sophistication” (*ibid.*, pg. 251).
21. Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, pg. 162, italics in original.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 85.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
24. *Ibid.*, the description of Kreeft's out-of-body experience is found in chapter six, pp. 85-111.
25. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, op. cit., pg. 418.
26. Robert P. Lightner, “Contending for the Faith Without Being Contentious,” 2010 Saint Louis Conference on Biblical Discernment, CD-1007.



THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

(continued from page 1)

An article by John R.W. Stott, an early architect of the two-pronged approach, was posthumously published in *Christianity Today*. It stated:

“We are convinced of the power of the gospel in evangelism — that it brings salvation and redemption to those who respond and believe in Jesus. But it isn't only the gospel that is powerful. All God's truth is powerful.”¹

Such a statement, on its face, is not debatable. But Christians should take heed of where it leads. Stott has endorsed, if not created, the vision statement of The Lausanne Movement: “The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.” While this makes for a catchy slogan, almost every word has to be examined.

Given the high emphasis on ecumenical unity at all three of the Lausanne conferences on world evangelization, including the latest in Cape Town in 2010, it appears that the “whole church” includes virtually all branches and traditions within Christendom, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and mainline denominations. The “whole gospel” will be defined by what is meant by the “whole world.” According to The Lausanne Movement, “the whole world” is framed around six major themes, including “The World of Violence” and “The World of Poverty and Injustice.”² The “whole gospel” by default includes not only the good news that Jesus Christ has died to provide salvation, but also addresses the social injustices found in our world today. As further evidence of this, we turn to positional papers flowing from Cape Town 2010. One such document from the conference reads:

“Cape Town 2010 must call evangelicals to recognise afresh the biblical affirmation of God's redemptive purpose for *creation* itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people. ... Christians who are working in environmental biology and creation care have a valid missional calling which needs to be recognised, encouraged and resourced by the church, for they model how to integrate the care of creation into what it means to proclaim Jesus as Lord. Caring