

Discernment And The Watchman

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Just as 1 Peter 3:15 commands us as Christians to always be ready to give a defense of your faith to those outside (apologetics) the church, Jude 3 to defend it within the Church (polemics). Jude had to have been aware of Peter's proclamation because his book extends off of Peter's second epistle on the false teachers who were beginning to come into the church.

Jesus said: "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged" (Mat. 7:2). If you judge something by the word of God you should be willing to be judged by the same standard. Jesus repeatedly taught men to judge rightly, insisting they "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24) and He praised a man who "rightly judged" (Luke 7:43). The Apostle Paul wrote, "He who is spiritual judges all things" for "we have the mind of Christ" (1Cor. 2:15-16). We are never to judge the eternal destiny of someone, but we are commanded to judge their teachings.

When a teaching or practice does not line up with God's Word, we are commanded "by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

We are told to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, **rebuke**, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2).

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (show them for what they really are) them." (Eph.5:11).

All these are stated to protect sheep who do not know better and can be influenced by something non-Biblical that can affect their Christian walk adversely. It is also to stop the aberrant teacher so they can be corrected. Keeping the church open to a person's ministry that is teaching falsehood is not a loving action. A true shepherd's first concern is to protect the sheep and then direct his attention to the individual who needs the correction.

Today the Church has moved from the challenges from without to addressing those from within. The center of concern is now within the Church's walls itself. As a result, many had to focus inward and use polemics to protect the Church; which is applying apologetics toward those in the assembly. When we find false teaching outside the Church, for instance from Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, everyone can agree there is a problem. But when false teaching is found inside the Church then the issue becomes delicate, and the act of addressing and exposing it is considered fault-finding! This is a tragic irony, for discernment means bringing into question something that can or already has divided the Church from the doctrine we are to uphold and practice. For the apostle John says 2 John 10, 11. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Back then the house was the church, they were not to give these people a platform to influence the assembly. Today many people watch ministries on TV who bring another doctrine and let them in their house, we are commanded not to.

It's been said by some that the truth can defend itself, there is no need to address falsehood. This statement is not only non-Biblical it can be disastrous. Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, and Jude all addressed error and falsehood.

The famous preacher J. Gresham Machen said it this way: "Again, men tell us that our preaching should be positive and not negative, that we can preach the truth without attacking error. But if we follow that advice we shall have to close our Bible and desert its teachings. The New Testament is a polemic book almost from beginning to end ... It is when men have felt compelled to take a stand against error that they

have risen to the really great heights in the celebration of the truth" (*What Is Christianity*, as cited in *Biblical Separation*, by Ernest Pickering, p. 97).

If we acted like the Bereans that Paul commended, much of the teachings we hear today by the Word of God and not according to someone's popularity, we would have to reject many popular ministers. The fact is--some big ministries should be questioned by the church. Not promoting them is not enough--the people need to be warned about them. By discerning what is being said, testing it, we find what is challenging the truth we defend the faith by the Word of God. whatever can anyone find wrong with this?

Some people's solution is "Test nothing" do not expose the unfruitful works of darkness", they want you to "love the wolves like you do the sheep." Both Jesus and Paul state that in the last days many are going to be drawn away by false teachers and prophets both in and outside the church, speaking in the name of Jesus. As Walter Martin said prophetically, "The reason is because the people will not test them. The Church will become fragmented and divided because we won't put them to the test." But there is a purpose in testing as Paul writes, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions (heresies) exist among you; and in part, I believe it. *For there must also be heresies among you*, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you" (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). To test what is said then gives approval to those who correct in doctrine and helps us identify whom we are to separate from who are wrong in doctrine (Romans 16:17). The Church has always chosen to separate from error and falsehood in the past, today it has not come as easily. The main purpose in discerning is to give Christians information equip them to protect themselves and their own congregations. In the times we live in we are to encourage preachers to stand true to the Word of God. Those who follow the truth listen to the Word--those who follow false prophets listen to these men and women even when they contradict the teachings of Scripture. Sounds simple enough to identify, but not when one is in the thick of things.

Discernment is a necessary spiritual practice for one's survival in the jungle of today's non-biblical teaching. Being clever or intelligent does not necessarily mean you are exercising discernment. It is listening to the revealed voice of the shepherd in the Scriptures so that we can know a false shepherd/teacher/prophet in disguise. The Bereans were exercising discernment. A Berean is someone who goes to the Word; he esteems God's Word over any man's word, personality or the prestige of men. One does not become a Berean overnight; it takes training and time. When Paul came to the Bereans and they looked into the Word to see if what Paul was saying was in fact correct, this was not a new concept but an Old Testament one. When the Pharisees disputed Jesus over His claims, He pointed them to the Word. When Paul reasoned with the Bereans they received what he said with readiness. But they did not just take his word, they went to the Scripture as their source to see if what he was saying was true. Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans "were of more fair minded (noble character) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness (great eagerness) and searched (examined) the Scriptures daily (every day) to find out whether these things were so (if what Paul said was true)." They had a right spirit and attitude as they questioned the apostle, not by their opinions but from the Scripture. The greater portion of the New Testament is written by the Apostle Paul, yet he allowed for them to question Him. He called them of better blood than their brethren they were noble, because they tested his statements. To honestly investigate truth actually shows that someone has integrity and is willing to believe God and not man. And they are willing to follow it wherever it may lead. If we detect a flaw that arrests our attention it just may be the Holy Spirit giving us some insight. There is nothing wrong with doubting experiences; what we cannot do is doubt His Word. Not all doubt is from the enemy; God can give us doubt so we can test to see if something else might be in operation. 1 Corinthians 2:15 tells us to discern or appraise ALL things (The Greek word is *anakrino*); there are places the Bible commands us to judge, and there are places we are not to. In this Scripture it tells us he who is spiritual is to judge all things. Just as Hebrews 5:13 explains, it is the spiritual person who will test things, the unspiritual will not. Those who do not test we are told are still immature and on milk. We are able to prove we know spiritual truth by our resistance to the falsehood.

In Isaiah 21:6 it says "Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he sees." The watchman was the first line of defense of a fortified city. They stood on the watchtower and were trained to spot the enemies of Israel

and would warn of an approaching enemy. Watchman in Hebrew is opeh, meaning "one who looks out, spies, watches."(In this particular Scripture the destruction of Babylon is determined.)

They are under conviction and will become guilty if they do not say something. Just as Ezekiel was the watchman for Israel God has his watchmen for the church. Ezekiel 33: 6,11 "But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand" "As I live" says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'" "(2 Sam 18:25; 2 Kings 9:17-18. 3. Sword. Cf, Ezek 21:1-19. Trumpet. See Hos 8:1; Jer 6:1; Neh 4:19-20"(from Wycliffe Bible Commentary).

God raises up men with ministries to "dig in the walls" and watch for apostasy and warn them when it is taking place. Like Ezekiel was instructed to do for Israel (Ezek. 8:7-10). Ezekiel was then instructed to preach about what he had witnessed (Ezek. 11:4,25). If the Lord has called someone to do this and they do not, the blood is on their hands, as Paul said like Ezekiel woe is me if I do not do it! (Acts 20:27) "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor.9:16). The prophet is duty bound, and has the responsibility to warn as a watchman concerning any perceived danger, just as the prophet is to sound out God's warning against sin. Paul warned the Ephesian church night and day with tears against the savage wolves that would come from among them. The Ephesians were later commended by Jesus for testing those who claimed to be apostles in Revelation 2:2. This is the Church that Paul warned in Acts 20:29 about savage wolves and they were obedient to his warning.

To Ezekiel God said "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against the Me... neither fear them or fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not..." (Ezek. 2:3,6,7). Paul also told Timothy the very same thing; "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (Timothy 4:2). Some people are appointed and must speak out as it was with Jeremiah, a fire burns within their bones, it is oftentimes a thankless job rewarding only to the one who has obeyed what the Lord required of him. They were not concerned about the numbers but about the truth. Every battle in our spiritual warfare has a mission of falsehood to the body of Christ; it targets the truth.

Instead the watchmen who are warning the church, standing for the truth become the target for all kinds of attacks.

Those who exercise discernment make themselves more of a target to be attacked more than any other ministry because they are contending with the truth against the falsehood that is so prevalent today. Sometimes people don't know a good thing until they really need it. I often get letters from people I went back and forth on certain issues months before. They write letters of apology because after they have calmed down they investigated what I said and found it to be true and left the church or cult they were involved with. Sometimes things take time but praying in faith I believe God is working on some of these peoples hearts that are at first so argumentative.

Today to obey the negative biblical commands of Christ are unloving-To carefully test things by the Bible is unloving-To warn of false gospels is unloving-To mark and avoid false teachers is mean-spirited and unloving. What ever happened to "IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our home with him" (John 14:23) "If you love you Me you will continue in MY word." Keeping His words means to also watch, to discern, to test, to judge. To walk in love means you watch out for others, not just yourself. Speak up when it is necessary.

The Liberals in the church have stripped the people of any inclination to pursue the truth. Everything has become reversed. Pointing out the problem becomes the problem, and the one who sees the error is called divisive.

It now matters more what you say about someone than the truth. A lesson in how not to judge--Don't judge until someone says something about your teacher then you can judge them and call them every negative name possible to show they are judgmental. This is a sad reversal of what the Bible actually says.

The disputes in the church have become like the politics of the Republicans and Democrats. But this is not about running the country but something much more serious, handling the Word of God correctly. The spiritually correct are no different than the politically correct, they have no opinion except to say no one should have an opinion other than agree with theirs. They tenaciously fight for their opinion then demonize others who stand on the biblical commands. Liberalism has invaded pulpits to the extent that the Bible means only what one thinks it means. The bottom line is and always will be what does the Bible actually say not twist the words to conform to one's own predilection.

A. W. Tozer wrote before he went to be with the Lord in 1963 in his book *The Dwelling Place of God* "intentionally or innocently by someone's personal testimony, or by a colorful story told by a fervent preacher who may speak with prophetic finality, but has not checked his story with the facts, nor tested the soundness of his conclusions by God's Word.

However high the emotional content, no experience can be proved to be genuine unless we can find chapter and verse authority for it in the Scriptures. Whatever is new or singular should also be viewed with a lot of caution until it can furnish scriptural proof of its validity. Over the last half-century, quite a number of unscriptural notions have gained acceptance among Christians by claiming that they were among the truth that was to be revealed in the last days. To be sure, say the advocates of this latter-day-light theory:

"Augustine did not know, Luther did not, John Knox, Wesley, Finney and Spurgeon did not understand this; but greater light has now shined upon God's people and we of these last days have the advantage of fuller revelation. We should not question the new doctrine or draw back from this advanced experience. The Lord is getting His Bride ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb. We should all yield to 'this new movement of the Spirit.'" So they tell us.

The truth is that the Bible does NOT teach that there will be new light and advanced spiritual experiences in the latter days. It teaches the exact opposite. Nothing in Daniel or the New Testament epistles can be tortured into advocating the idea that we of the end of the Christian era shall enjoy light that was not known at its beginning.

Beware of any man who claims to be wiser than the apostles or "holier than the martyrs of the Early Church. The best way to deal with him is to rise and leave his presence. You cannot help him and he surely cannot help you. (A.W. Tozer, *The Dwelling Place of God*)

A pastor is responsible for teaching the truth in his own church, and he needs to know the condition of his flock. Like shepherding a literal sheep flock requires vigilance and a sharp eye for danger (not to mention correcting guidance for grazing), some pastors haven't taken seriously the call to be watchmen. More watchmen are needed today not less.

Today if someone doesn't get their prophecy right they adjust it. If someone challenges them on what they have said as unbiblical they just ignore it. Only a few people see things the way they actually are. When they speak up others look at them as the enemy of the church, as if they are coming against Christ has said. It was the same for Israel with their watchmen and their prophets. They refused to hear what they had to say; instead they listened to the false prophets. Israel's attitude of tolerance for the false prophets is what got Jeremiah at the bottom of a well.

When occult or cultic beliefs become integrated into the church's practice under the cover of Christian terminology, they pass under the radar screen of many who cannot recognize it for what they are. And it requires an astute person who is trained to discern them and point them out. People should be thankful that someone has the gifting, the ability, the willingness and boldness to "tell it like it is. Instead, people in

the church scream out, "don't judge" "don't touch my anointed." Don't judge doesn't help you one bit if you are in error, but strips you of your discernment and protects those who are teaching falsely. God is into protecting His people from harm, He does not want us to protect false teachers, but be protected from them.

Jude writes to the Church "Contend earnestly for the faith" Attacks were being made on the sacred deposit of Christian truth, doctrines which were to keep everyone on course were being wittled away. So there was need to strengthen them. Contend is a strong word, it means to strive (like an athlete in public games) this word epogomzomai is a unique word, meaning to be combatant, contending, it is not passive. The word earnestly gives an even more serious and forceful meaning to this phrase. 1 Tim 6:12 Paul writes "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." What we believe we are to defend. Christ is to permeate every aspect of our social and personal life. We were not chosen to be frozen to our rear, the time is to do something, and it is up to each one of us not to only a few. How weighty is your Christianity, or is it light. How bright is your light or how dim is it. Its been said if you don't speak up for anything you will sit down with everything.

This faith Jude says is once delivered unto the saints, means "once for all," completed. He is referencing the apostles teaching, that we now all share as believers. This confirms the finality of the revelation of God in Christ. If we are in the faith we are implored to use it. But this is not to be done in a contentious way. 2 Tim 2:23-26 "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

We are to strive lawfully, so that we do not disqualify ourselves or give the unbeliever or believer something to point to; we are to testify without ruining our testimony. That no one would have anything to say about our character, but only about the truth that we presented about Jesus. We are not to revile nor seek vengeance, but use the judgment from the word of God not judge by our feelings or own opinions.

Vernon McGee on his commentary of Jude writes: "For ten long and weary years, the Greeks laid siege to the city of Troy, but they did not make a dent in the fortifications. It seemed impregnable, and they could not get an entrance into the city. Then there came forth a suggestion. The suggestion was to build a wooden horse with soldiers concealed inside, to leave it outside the gate, and then to pretend to sail away. So they made the wooden horse, the soldiers were put inside, and it was put by the gate of the city of Troy. Well, curiosity got the best of the Trojans. When they saw the Greeks sailing away, they thought the war was over. They went out, saw the horse, and decided to pull it inside the city. It certainly was a novelty, something to have. That night, the soldiers who were on the inside climbed out, and they were able to unlock the gates of the city from the inside. In the meantime, under cover of darkness, the fleet of Greek ships returned. They had only pretended to sail away. What an entire army of mighty men could not do from the outside in ten years, a few soldiers did from the inside. In the same way, the church has been harmed today and has been taken over by liberalism: Actually, the church has never been harmed from the outside. Persecution caused it to grow by leaps and bounds. Today we are witnessing the destruction of the church from the inside-it's an inside job. Christ was betrayed from the inside, not from the outside. One of His own betrayed Him over to His nation,. His nation betrayed Him over to the Romans, and the Romans: brought Him to the cross. The church is being betrayed today by the ones who, have gotten: in by the side door."

They snuck in as Peter states and we allow them the best seats in the house, how rude we have been to the Holy Spirit, ignoring the one who is the author of truth by not testing these false ones with His Word.

Today's ecumenical unity is based on finding and maintaining our lowest common denominator, not interested in pursuit of our highest calling and purpose. When we sacrifice truth for unity no disagreement is found because there is no Biblical standard upheld to agree on.

Grechen Machen stated, "We are told that our theological differences will disappear if we just get down on our knees together in prayer. Well, I can only say about that kind of prayer, which is indifferent to the question whether the gospel is true or false, that it is not Christian prayer; it is bowing down in the house of Rimmon. God save us from it!" (*Education, Christianity & The State*, p. 28)

2 John 9 writes to us about deceivers and tells us that the only way to know is by doctrine: "Whoever transgresses (goes beyond the boundaries set forth and already established) and does not abide (live in, trust, stay in remain in) the doctrine of Christ does not have God." Doctrine is must to uphold. Not all things are to be considered serious but some are, some battles are worth fighting over.

I think I can speak on behalf of the many who are discerning, that we all desire to see the body of Christ to have the willingness to address the issues at hand biblically, honestly and with integrity so they can be resolved. But they need to be addressed, they cannot be ignored. 1 Cor. 1:10: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

We do not have too much judgment, but little judgment and this is why the church is in the state it is in. The author in Hebrew tells us "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil "(Heb. 5:13-14).

It is the mature believers who judges, those who are of "maturity," are those who have trained themselves by exercising their senses to discern between good and evil through the Word. Those who do not judge are babes in the word. Maybe this is the answer, many have not become mature so they are unable to tell the truth from error.

Today there has been a slow weakening of the overall church, but individuals are being strengthened to serve the Lord. I believe the Lord is telling us to strengthen what remains. Strengthen it in our personal lives and strengthen it in the church because we are heading toward some very unusual and unsteady times in the world and the church, everything will most certainly be affected. We are to maintain a constant watchfulness, as though we are in warfare; because we are in spiritual warfare.

Solomon's guidance: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27). Solomon says to walk away from those who teach error. Paul does, John does and so does Jesus. God's Word tells us to judge and put away, separate ourselves from false teachers and false teaching when they first appear in our midst. It is for our spiritual survival.

Let me end with some words of wisdom from Charles Spurgeon who writes "Complicity with error will take from the best of men the power to enter any successful protest against it ... Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin ... As soon as I saw, or thought I saw, that error had become firmly established, I did not deliberate, but quitted the body at once. Since then my counsel has been 'Come out from among them.' I have felt that no protest could be equal to that of distinct separation from known evil ... That I might not stultify my testimony I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them" (C.H.S., *The Sword and the Trowel*.)