

Doctrine of Biblical Discernment

1. It is a principle of Biblical hermeneutics that dramatic distinctions should not be made where none exist.
2. A basic Hebrew word for discern is *nakar* and means, “to scrutinize, i.e. look intently”.
3. The purpose of being able to discern a situation is in order to pass judgment.
4. The first usage of the word *nakar* is found when Laban was invited by Jacob to discern, to scrutinize, to look intently for his household idols among the belongings of Jacob.
 - *Genesis 31:32 With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.*

Special Note.

Ironically, Laban was not very discerning for he did not find the stolen treasures he was looking for. Had Laban been a more discerning man he would have found the idols Rachel had stolen.

5. The second time *nakar* is used in Scripture, a woman’s life was spared because she was able to establish the identity of the man who had impregnated her based upon individuals discerning the physical evidence presented and rendering a righteous judgment based on that discernment. Instead of being stoned for a pregnancy outside of marriage, Tamar gave birth to twins.
 - *Genesis 38:25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.*
6. When Joab wanted to reconcile David with his son Absalom, the officer of the king’s armies used a woman to tell a narrative designed to appeal to the king’s ability to discern good and bad.
 - *2 Samuel 14:17 Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the Lord thy God will be with thee.*

Special Note.

The word used for discern in 2 Samuel 14:17 is, *shama*”, and means, “to hear intelligently.”

Biblical discernment involves an intense inquiry into a situation, an honest evaluation of the evidence presented, and an intelligent understanding of the whole matter.

7. Sometimes, a person’s inability to discern between good and evil should be recognized reflected in the life of Barzillai who at eighty years of age declined to return to Jerusalem with David.
 - *2 Samuel 19:35 I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?*
8. The purpose of Biblical discernment is to render a righteous judgment which is why Solomon asked for an understanding heart. Discernment leads to judgment and cannot be divorced from it.
 - *1 Kings 3:9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?*

Special Note.

The Hebrew word Solomon used for discern is *biyn* (bene) and means, “to separate mentally (or distinguish), i.e. (generally) to understand”. It is meaningless to have discernment unless discernment is used to render a righteous judgment.

9. God is pleased to grant His people discernment in administering justice.
 - *1 Kings 3:11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; 12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*
10. Sometimes the word discern is used to simply mean to, “distinguish”, or “recognize”, and does not involve a moral judgment.
 - The people could not distinguish between the sound of joy and sorrow. *Ezra 3:13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.*

- Job could not recognize an image before his eyes. *Job 4:16 It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying,*
 - Infants and little children cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left. *Jonah 4:11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*
11. Spiritually, the tongue of the righteous can make a distinction between what is good speech and what is perverse speech.
- *Job 6:30 Is there iniquity in my tongue? Cannot my taste discern perverse things?*
12. When the people of God are righteous they are able to teach one another how to properly discern or judge between that which is unclean and that which is clean.
- *Ezekiel 44:23 And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*
13. When the people of God are righteous they will be discerning.
- *Malachi 3:18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*
14. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they were not able to discern the signs of the times in spiritual matters, or they would have embraced Him as the Messiah.
- *Matthew 16:3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*
 - *Luke 12:56 Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?*
15. When a person does not discern their own heart and stand in self-judgment, they subject themselves to a premature death.
- *1 Corinthians 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*
 - *1 Corinthians 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*
16. There is a particular spiritual gift of discernment which should be recognized. The church needs individuals with the spiritual gift of discernment in or to evaluate the spirits: the Holy Spirit, human, or demonic spirits, thus preserving the church from misleading influences.

- *1 Corinthians 12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*
- *1 Corinthians 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.*
- *1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

17. One mark of spiritual maturity is the ability to discern both good and evil and so to render a just judgment.

- *Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*