

The Death of Discernment In The Church

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Have you considered the spiritual health of your church in these days of tolerance and compromise? Is the leadership earnestly contending for the faith against the current wave of ecumenism? A. W. Tozer used the illustration of circulating blood to describe the health of a church. "The red corpuscles are like faith - they carry the life giving oxygen to every part of the body. The white cells are like discernment - they pounce upon dead and toxic matter and carry it out to the drain. In a healthy heart there must be provision for keeping dead and poisonous matter out of the life stream."

Using Tozer's analogy, churches that are dead or dying are the churches that no longer have the ability or the desire to discern truth from error. If they cannot identify toxic doctrinal error, the poison can never be removed from the body. And if it is not removed it will continue to circulate, bringing confusion to believers and false hope to "seekers."

The Emerging Church

Based on the reports we hear from our subscribers all over the world, there are many churches on the edge of apostasy. Many are subscribing to the latest post-modern fad called "the emerging church" which attempts to reach the emerging generation with a new way of "doing church." If you key "emerging church" in your favorite search engine, you will see numerous entries declaring that worship should now be a mystical and holistic experience using images, candles, stained glass windows and even darkness to enhance spirituality. One of the leaders of the movement is Brian McLaren, pastor and author of the controversial and award winning book, *A New Kind of Christian*. The book expressly argues that the Bible should not be regarded as infallible or authoritative. McLaren seeks unity between Catholics and Evangelicals and applauds Chuck Colson for leading this unbiblical movement.

The emerging church places more importance on mystical and sensual worship experiences that unite rather than essential biblical doctrines that divide. Churches that move from a Word-driven message to an image-driven message only contribute to the "dumbing down" of professing Christians. Few will be able to discern the difference between the true Gospel and a counterfeit gospel. The end result will be unsanctified churches which tolerate, embrace and encourage unbelievers instead of edifying and equipping a new generation of believers.

Emerging But Not Discerning

Irving Bible Church, located between Dallas and Ft. Worth has emerged into a church without discernment. The pastor, Andy McQuitty, has publicly stated that both John Paul II and Mother Teresa are most assuredly in heaven. In the May issue of the church's monthly magazine Chatter, he featured a 11 " by 14" picture of these two influential Catholics who deceived the world with another gospel. McQuitty called the differences between Catholics and Protestants "theological pettiness." He said, "it is just plain silly to write each other off as far as true Christianity is concerned. We'll have plenty of time in Heaven to figure out who was right about Purgatory and Mary." McQuitty can't see why both faiths can't cooperate "in building the Kingdom of our common Lord Jesus Christ." He described John Paul as "a Man of God, not a man of this world, who became popular by testifying to the unpopular truths of Jesus Christ." According to McQuitty, the pope was "a great man whom all Christians should admire, thank and emulate." Finally he wrote, "I confess as a protestant pastor that my spiritual life and faith has been enriched by this Catholic pope who taught me that being a hero isn't about success or power."

Evidently Irving Bible Church (IBC) has a few discerning souls who prompted McQuitty to send out this public e-mail. "A few of you have raised concerns, most of which can be boiled down to this question: 'Is IBC becoming Roman Catholic?' To which the answer is, 'No way, Jose.'" He wrote: "I understand where the question comes from, though. The introduction at IBC of certain elements such as candles and liturgies and communion wafers and the reference to communion as the "Eucharist", combined with the recent death of Pope John Paul II and the attendant recognition that his life received here, has caused some

(particularly those who were raised Catholic and had a less than happy experience) to bristle."

McQuitty sounds like many Catholics who think we left the Roman Catholic Church because we "had a less than happy experience." No, we left when our Sovereign Lord opened our eyes to see the true Gospel as He revealed it in His supremely authoritative Word. As with other born-again former Catholics, we all left because we could no longer stay in a false religion that deceives its people on life's most critical issue - "What must I do to be saved?" We all left in obedience to God's word, to worship Him in Spirit and Truth (John 4:24). If we were a member of Irving Bible Church, we would have to leave that church as well because the pastor has demonstrated no discernment and an unwillingness to be corrected by Scripture. A pastor without spiritual discernment cannot protect his congregation from Satan's continuous attacks on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some will say that I am being judgmental and that I have no right to do so. But how can Christians contend earnestly for the faith unless they make judgments on what "the faith" is? How can Christians defend and proclaim the Gospel without discerning what "the Gospel" is? We see a biblical example of one brother judging another when Paul publicly corrected Peter who was not being "straightforward about the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:11-14). A. W. Tozer said: "Among the gifts of the Spirit, scarcely is one of greater practical usefulness than the gift of discernment. This gift should be highly valued and frankly sought as being almost indispensable in these critical times. This gift will enable us to distinguish the chaff from the wheat and to divide the manifestations of the flesh from the operations of the Spirit."

Christians Are Exhorted To Judge

Many Christians are unaware of their responsibility to judge and test all things. Paul exhorted: "I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9-10). Christians need to take discernment and judgment seriously in this life

because of the great responsibility that awaits us in the future. Paul reminds us: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?" (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Paul even commended the Bereans for rightfully judging his teaching. "They received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The apostle John warned and exhorted Christians: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Clearly, all Christians are called to judge righteously by using the Word of God as the plumb line for discerning truth from error.

Discernment Is a Discipline

New babes in Christ must discipline themselves to go beyond the "milk" of the Gospel and begin chewing on "solid food" by studying the whole counsel of God. "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). Spiritual discernment is a discipline and a privilege that only Christians can exercise. Paul wrote: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things." (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

How Are We To Judge?

John wrote: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Jesus said: "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Mat. 7:1-5). The instruction Jesus gives for judging others is to make sure you are not guilty of the same error or sin! Paul echoed these words when he wrote: "Do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" (Rom. 2:3). When we judge, we must judge righteously and with pure hearts!

The Goal of Discernment

As we practice the gift of discernment let us question our motives. Is our objective to be obedient to God's word for the purpose of helping, healing, correcting, warning and sharing in the spirit of love? Does our discernment lead people towards truth and righteous living? Are we concerned for the purity of the body of Christ? Have we come to acknowledge that when the gift of discernment is not exercised, the church cannot be purged of error and sin and the name of Jesus Christ cannot be fully glorified and honored as the Holy Head of His Body, the Church.

The critical issue in the Church today is the purity of the Gospel. That alone is the rudder that must guide the Church through stormy waters that have been stirred up by every wind of doctrine. Take away the ability to discern objective truth and churches turn into cafeterias serving whatever junk food people want instead of the disciplined diet they *need* for spiritual life and health. Without a steady diet of the whole counsel of God, churches become entertainment centers for goats instead of sanctuaries for the Shepherd's sheep (Mat. 25:32). Unregenerate people, who are never exhorted to examine their faith, will continue attending church to enjoy the music, entertainment and "feel good" messages. Unless these people are confronted with their sin, their need for a Savior and the eternal consequences of a spurious faith, they are destined to hear these terrifying words from Jesus: "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Mat. 7:23).

May God help us all to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.