

# Biblical Discernment

## How To Discern, Test & Judge Rightly

**John\_7:24 Judge** not according to the appearance, but **judge** righteous judgment.

The Bereans in Acts 17 are called noble because they searched the Scriptures to see if what the Apostle Paul was teaching was according to the revealed and written Scriptures (v11). They exercised discernment and did not accept anything just because a great Apostle was teaching them!

Many Christians are not willing to judge, test or discern anything or anybody! Often people get offended if we point out anything wrong or false in some teachings. This is due to lack of discerning knowledge based on the Scriptures. It is hardly taught in the churches as pastors themselves compromise and accept all sorts of teachers and their teachings. It is high time we learn how to discern, test and judge a teaching or a teacher of the Word.

Let me start out this chapter by telling you what methods are being used for “discernment” today that don’t have biblical support, then I will move on to the ways in which the Bible does tell us to test teaching, prophecy and actions.

The following criteria are what many people who call themselves Christians are using to test reality and truth today:

- (1) Experiences, manifestations
- (2) Feelings, emotions
- (3) Numbers of followers
- (4) Numbers of people who claim to be saved
- (5) The size of a church or movement
- (6) Signs and wonders, purported miracles (whether real or false)
- (7) Subjective testimonies
- (8) Hearsay and rumors
- (9) How successful and rich a teacher is
- (10) If a person speaks with authority
- (11) The atmosphere of a meeting

None of the above criteria being used by many churchgoers today are cited in the Bible as ways we are to test, discern and judge rightly.

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

1 Cor. 5:12 For what have I to do to **judge** them also that are without? do not ye **judge** them that are within?

1 Cor. 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall **judge** the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to **judge** the smallest matters?

1 Cor. 6:3 Know ye not that we shall **judge** angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

1 Co. 11:31 For if we would **judge** ourselves, we should not be judged.

### Experiences

Experiences and manifestations can be from many sources; physical, emotional, mental, paranormal/demonic, or from the Lord. ALL experiences need to be tested against the testimony and teachings of the tried and true written word of God. “Slain in the spirit” is an occult technique imported into Christianity, and has nothing to do with what we are taught in the Scriptures. The prophets, Apostles and Jesus Christ did not do it or teach it as something that should be done. If you have an experience, you had better check the source. Think twice before you submit to people laying hands on you for whatever reason.

## Feelings

Mormons made the “burning in the breast” standard fare for their followers, but now a large cross section of Christendom has been taught to judge everything by similar criteria. Modern Christians are, for the most part, not being taught to submit to the Word of God — but rather to the way they feel emotionally. The phrase “I think” has been replaced by the phrase “I feel”. This is partially due to influences from the New Age through movies like Star Wars. But in the last twenty years teachers in the Church have taught a whole generation to rely on their feelings.

Emotions are a part of the realm of the flesh and the mind (soul). Emotions can be used by God, but often they are a way for the enemy to get Christians away from the truths of the Bible and gain a foothold in their lives.

## Numbers Of Followers

Many leaders have large numbers of followers, including cultists and other religious “gurus”. In fact some of the most popular leaders, who have the most followers, are not Christian. Numbers of followers is not a good test of the authenticity of a leader or his ministry.

## Numbers Claiming Salvation

Ultimately, only God knows who is saved. Believers can certainly tell if people are false prophets and heretics and must be rejected, but we are not the ultimate judge of their salvation. One fact is certain. When someone claims to be saved they will evidence the fruit of the Spirit, believe in and teach sound doctrine, and not make false prophecies.

## Church Size

Church size means nothing in the realm of discernment. God looks for quality over quantity, regardless of what “apostles” like C. Peter Wagner claim:

*“... we ought to see clearly that the end DOES justify the means. What else possible could justify the means? If the method I am using accomplishes the goal I am aiming at, it is for that reason a good method. If, on the other hand, my method is not accomplishing the goal, how can I be justified in continuing to use it?” (C. Peter Wagner, “Your Church Can Grow - Seven Vital Signs Of A Healthy Church”, 1976, pg. 137. - emphasis in original)*

Quantitative judgments are of men. The size of a church could be due to God blessing a ministry and people being truly saved or due to the oratorical skills of a preacher. Big clubs are not necessarily good clubs. Church size is no way to test a ministry.

## Signs And Wonders

Signs and wonders are a dime a dozen today and have just as many evidences in false churches the occult as they do in biblical Christianity. Jesus did state that those who saw him perform miracles should have believed, though for the most part they did not. They couldn’t even tell the signs of the times (Matt. 16:1-4). People today love to be able to claim they saw or experienced a wonder or miracle from God. Perhaps this is because they want to feel like they have been touched by God personally, are holy, or simply want to be accepted by their peers. If you are going to claim you have seen or experienced a miracle from God, then that miracle must be held up to biblical criteria to prove it is a biblical Divine healing as opposed to many other forms of healing. I cover this subject later on in the chapter called “Test Everything”. True believers are careful not to use deceptive methods, to lie about experiences and signs, in order to gain converts.

*2 Corinthians 4:2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.*

## Subjective Testimonies

Testimonies are nice and can even be an inspiration (if they are true), but they are also inherently subjective. In other words, they are hard, if not impossible, to prove objectively, unless incontrovertible proof exists. Don’t allow testimonies, uplifting as they may be, to get in the way of biblical methods of testing. Don’t rely on

testimonies to shape your belief system. Just as you would test a cake to see if it is done by manually inserting a toothpick, instead of relying on the good smell of the cake and the feelings you get from its aroma, don't use subjective methods to test stories—use the objective Word of God.

### **Hearsay**

Most stories are being passed along today as hearsay. They often gain a little here and there until they have been blown all the way out of proportion from the original account. Don't pass along rumors, gossip and stories unless you check them out thoroughly. In this day and age of the Internet, that has become a much easier task, so there is no excuse to avoid researching claims from all angles. Don't just take people's word for it. Do the math yourself.

### **Success Of A Teacher**

Anyone can be successful given the tools, the gifts, the right connections and the right circumstances. Some of the most godly men and women in the church have been dirt poor. Don't be swayed by rich televangelists. They have often raised their money off the backs of the less fortunate, the naïve, the hopeless, the poor, the fatherless, the widows. True success is not measured by money, power, number of followers, or any of the criteria of the "American Dream". Man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart. We can get a pretty clear picture of the heart of a person if we test what they say and what they do against the Scriptures.

### **Apparent Authority**

Many men and women are capable of speaking with authority. It can be a natural gift, a demonic gift or a gift from God. But it is no way to test whether a person is a true or false teacher. Authority can be put on, learned, acted. True authority from God is accompanied by true teaching, true prophecy and the fruit of the Spirit.

### **Atmosphere**

Benny Hinn claims he needs an "atmosphere" to do his "miracles".

*Interviewer: If Benny Hinn is real, he'll go into the hospitals and cure everyone there.*  
*Benny Hinn: "I've been told that many times. What I tell them is quite simple. Healing most times needs an atmosphere of faith. I have gone to hospitals. I've done it actually many times or people's homes and pray for them. Most times, they cannot get healed. ... God's people make it happen; bring this atmosphere of faith ..."* (Benny Hinn, interview by Marla Weech, of WFTV, "Inside Central Florida")

When did the Apostles need an atmosphere to heal?

Beware of testing meetings by the atmosphere created there. Like an Amway meeting or halftime at a football game, an atmosphere can be manipulated. God does not need an stadium full of screaming Benny Hinn fans burning with fleshly passion to move. What He requires is simple obedience to His Word.

## **BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT**

There are three important biblical ways in which we are to use discernment.

- (1) **Test all teaching** for sound doctrine, and especially against the core doctrines of the Faith as laid down in the sixty six books of the Bible (see the chapter "Know What You Believe").
- (2) **Test all prophecies** to see if they are biblical and if the predictions of a prophet all come true.
- (3) **Test** their lives, words and actions **for the fruit of the Spirit**.

### **▶TEST THEIR TEACHINGS**

The Church and individual Christians, are commanded by the Lord to reject false teachers — heretics.  
*Titus 3:10 A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; (KJV)*

A heretic is defined by Peter as one who lays error alongside of truth, secretly introducing destructive heresies.

*2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

Christians are to reject those who preach a false gospel because they are condemned by the Lord..

*Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

Even Paul, a foundational Apostle, encouraged his listeners to test his teaching against the written Word of God, and he stated that those who teach must not “go beyond what is written.”

*Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.***

*1 Corinthians 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “**Do not go beyond what is written.**” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.*

### **Believers are to be discerning.**

*Phil. 1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

*Proverbs 15:14 The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.*

*Proverbs 17:24 A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool’s eyes wander to the ends of the earth.*

*Proverbs 18:15 The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.*

*Proverbs 28:7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.*

*Proverbs 3:21 My son, **preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight;***

Why do we test teaching against the Scriptures? Because we are commanded to remain in sound doctrine, to keep the faith, to follow the teachings of the prophets, Apostles and Jesus Christ.

*2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*

*Titus 1:9 **He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.***

*Titus 2:1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.*

False teachers are liars and do not remain in sound doctrine.

*1 Timothy 1:10 for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — **and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine***

### **► TEST THE SPIRITS**

We are warned by the Lord to test every spirit because many false prophets have gone out.

*1 John 4:1 Dear friends, 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.*

How do we test the spirits? By comparing what they are teaching and prophesying to the Scriptures, and if they are living in the fruit of the Spirit. How do we do that? First we must be a believer in Christ to test anything rightly.

*Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—** His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; **test yourselves.** Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?*

Then we test our own words and actions to be sure we are in the Faith and in sound doctrine.

*Galatians 6:4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,*

How much are we supposed to test? Everything.

*1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test everything. Hold on to the good.*

### ► JUDGE RIGHTLY

Are we to judge? Certainly. We are not to judge hypercritically (Matt. 7:1) — in other words, judging someone while doing the same thing ourselves. We are not the final judge of anyone's salvation. But we are to judge what people teach and prophesy. Paul commanded those who listened to him to judge what he was saying.

*1 Corinthians 10:15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.*

We must learn to judge rightly, now, because someday we will judge the earth and the angels with Christ.

*1 Corinthians 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!*

We are told by the Lord to judge those inside the Church because God judges those outside. We are to reject heretics and expel wicked men from the assembly of believers because if they are allowed to remain they will leaven the whole lump.

*1 Corinthians 5:12-13 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."*

### ► TEST THEIR PROPHECY

We are to test prophecy to see if it comes true and is biblical. A true prophet is 100% accurate because he worships God in Spirit and in truth and speaks the truth. We must reject false prophets and remove them from the assembly of believers.

*Duet. 13:1-5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.*

False prophets may have a good track record, but they are never 100% accurate. However, they may be able to fool people into thinking they do. That's where the teaching test comes in, and why it is listed as the first test of discernment. Some prophets can look really good, but if they are teaching heresy you can be sure it is a test from God to see if you will "love Him with all your heart". John tells us that if we love the Lord we will obey His commands (John 14:21, 15:10; 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 1:6). The Bible commands us over and over again to test, discern and judge teaching, prophecy and fruit. We must reject heretics who are unrepentant. If we do not obey the Lord in this, we are proving that we do not really love Him.

*Deuteronomy 18:20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."*

*We don't put false prophets to death today, but we are to remove ourselves from their presence.*

*Deuteronomy 18:22* **If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.**

The Lord is against those who give false prophecies.

*Jeremiah 23:32* Indeed, **I am against those who prophesy false dreams,**” declares the LORD. **“They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,”** declares the LORD.  
*Jeremiah 27:15* ‘I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD. ‘They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, **I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.**’”

Those who follow false prophets will share in their judgment.

*Jeremiah 5:31* The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?

*Jeremiah 23:31* Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’”

*Jeremiah 27:15* ‘I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD. ‘They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, **I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.**’”

*Ezekiel 13:9* My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.

We are not to even listen to false prophecy.

*Jeremiah 23:16* This is what the LORD Almighty says: **“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.**

False prophets are often those who claim they had a dream or a vision of the Lord or from the Lord.

*Jeremiah 23:25* “I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. **They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’**”

False prophets are actually using divination and the delusion of their own minds instead of communicating with God.

*Jeremiah 14:14* Then the LORD said to me, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. **They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.**”

*Ezekiel 22:28* Her prophets whitewash these deeds for them by false visions and lying divinations. **They say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says’— when the LORD has not spoken.**

## ► TEST THEIR FRUIT

The final test is to compare the words and actions of any teacher or prophet with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:18-25. It is also helpful to look at the list of things that are the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit.

If a person falsely prophesies, even once, they are likely using divination and false visions. Are they trying to build a following and promote themselves, gaining fame? Then they likely have “selfish ambition”. Do they promote “drunk in the Spirit”? That’s the sin of “drunkenness”. If they are stripping the poor of their money with crooked money-raising schemes, that’s not the fruit of kindness. If their meetings are marked by wild manifestations, they do not have the fruit of peace or self-control. If they are cocky mockers they do not have the fruit of gentleness.

**Gal. 5:18-25** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

The Lord will cut off anyone who does not bear fruit. This means anyone who does not have the fruit of the Spirit and has not been doing the will of the Father.

*John 15:2 **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.***

## CONCLUSION

Finally, we must understand that those who are false teachers, false prophets, without the fruit of the Spirit are a blight on true Christianity. We must separate ourselves from them.

*Rom. 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; **and avoid them***

*Eph. 5:11 **And have no fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **reprove them***

*2 Thess. 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh DISORDERLY, and not after the tradition which ye received of us** 2 Tim. 3:5,7 Concerning the last days, he says that some will have “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. **From such turn away**” for such people are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”*

*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 “*

*2 Cor. 6:17 Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no the unclean thing; and I will receive you***

*Jude 1:12 These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted— twice dead.*

We all were once in darkness. Now that we are in the light we must walk in the light, rejecting darkness.

*Eph. 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. **Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.***

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# TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE: THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT

by G. Richard Fisher

It seems clear, since Jesus Himself said, “Judge not,” (Matthew 7:1), that we cannot “judge.” At first glance it appears that Jesus not only forbids judging others, but that He catches Himself in a glaring contradiction.

Verse 1 seems obvious, “Judge not,” yet in verses 6, 15-16, we are to judge “swine,” “dogs,” and the “fruit” of false apostles. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? Do we judge or not?

Churches have split along lines of those who wish to make judgments and those who say we cannot. One side accuses the other of being legalistic and loveless while the other side is called liberal and spineless.

Rooting out the truth on this subject is essential and a thorough search will reveal that there are different kinds of judgment taught in Scripture. One form we are commanded to do; the other we are forbidden to do. Both sides could be right *and* wrong depending on what they are talking about. One could not read Matthew 18:16-18

seriously and conclude that we never judge anything. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul takes the people of God to task for not judging the right things the right way.

One of the biggest issues in the Church is how we arrive at truth. We have churches that think frenzied laughter is a way to worship God, while other churches conduct services that sound like a barnyard. Our land is dotted with Word-Faith proponents that see God as the great vending machine in the sky. All of the groups in this confusing mix say they are preaching the truth and being led by the Spirit.

It is also obvious that some arrive at truth in the same fashion as the poem, “Why Are Fire Engines Red?”

*They have four wheels and eight men  
four plus eight is twelve  
twelve inches make a ruler  
a ruler is Queen Elizabeth  
Queen Elizabeth sails the seven seas  
the seven seas have fish  
the fish have fins  
The Finns hate the Russians  
the Russians are red  
Fire engines are always rushin’  
So they’re red.*

Some groups handle the Bible in much the same way. Let’s consider four major points to help us unravel the question: When to judge and when not to judge?

## **THE LACK OF DISCERNMENT**

Discernment is largely missing from the Church, partly for the following reasons:

A. We have become man-centered and experience-driven. Some think Christianity has to emulate Disney World to capture and hold larger audiences. Entertainment becomes more man-centered than God-centered. Postmodernism and the death of reason permeate not only secular culture but many of our churches.

B. We have lost the knowledge of proper hermeneutics. Televangelists make up their own subjective meanings of Scripture as they go along saying only that they have “revelation knowledge” or “God told them.” In that way they hope to put themselves beyond scrutiny or evaluation.

C. The Church largely accepts the philosophy that truth is relative. Books are published today that try to stem the tide and argue for moral absolutes. Fifty years ago that would not have been necessary.

Jay Adams in almost prophetic fashion sounded an alarm 10 years ago that few listened to. In his book, *A Call to Discernment*, he noted the departure from antithetical thinking. For thousands of years, both Hebrew prophets and the Christian Church people believed that there was right and wrong, black and white.

Adams observes:

“According to continuum thinking, the mode of thinking taught outside the church (and largely within), every idea is a shade of gray. There is no right and wrong or true and false, but only shades of right and wrong or true and false spread along a continuum. The poles of this continuum are extended so far out toward the wings that for all practical purposes they are unattainable and therefore worthless. Nothing, then, is wholly right or wrong. All is relative; most of it is subjective.”

Continuing he says:

“That is one reason why biblical preaching, with its sharp antithesis, rubs many people the wrong way: It is hard for modern minds to accept. For a long time now educational institutions, newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, etc. have inculcated continuum thinking. Antithetical thinking is dismissed as fanatical or worse. Consequently, when Christians (all of whom have been affected by this environment) hear antithetical views expressed, they sound discordant. And indeed they are! Because anything goes, discernment is not placed at a premium” (pg. 30).



Adams points out that the clean-unclean distinctions in the Old Testament were given by God to create a totally antithetical view of life.

*The Daily Bread* devotional for Nov. 13, 1995, notes that false teachers worm their way in by zeroing in on our **emotions**:

“A false teacher knows what appeals to our desires (2 Pet. 2). He doesn’t wear a lapel pin to warn of his lies, but he comes disguised as a representative of the truth. He claims he will enrich lives, but those who follow him learn at a high cost that they have been deceived.”

The lack of discernment in the Church today is costing dearly. The Church is like a tree with every kind of bird (clean, unclean, wild, mild) nesting in it.

## **THE LIBERTY OF DISCERNMENT**

Judge — don’t judge — what do we do? Matthew 7:15 is clear that we can judge the message and fruit of false apostles. However, Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:1 that we should be careful in nitpicking and judging people’s motives or eternal destiny. Ultimately only God is the judge of those things. We can, after all, be too hard on people in minor matters.

The mystery clears up when we realize that the word “judge” can be used in different ways in different contexts. Understanding the context is the key to interpreting what kind of judging we are speaking about.

Ralph Walter in his small book, *Tortured Texts*, notes the differences:

“Consider first the Greek word *Krino*, translated *judge* in our text. If you look at a concordance of the King James Version, you will find the word has been translated: *conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, ordain, think* and then *judge* 87 times. Other Greek scholars say that *Krino* means *to call in question, conclude, decree, esteem, determine, think and sentence*. From all of this I think it would be safe to say that the word our Lord used means to condemn or to pass judgment upon someone maliciously; while the context shows that we have the responsibility to properly evaluate a thing or an act” (pp. 28-30).

An illustration might be a house in poor maintenance. We can see the paint peeling and the broken windows but would we condemn the owner as lazy? Suppose that the owner was an invalid or just too poor to have it fixed? We must be careful about judging without facts or beyond the obvious. Such judgments are condemnations and these are what Jesus condemned in Matthew 7:1. The Pharisees were notorious for judging based on silly rules and traditions and not the Scriptures.

Peter, Paul and John did a lot of judging the right way. Every second epistle is a judgment on apostasy. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul judges and warns about a man named Demas.

In the same epistle (2:17) he warns of the heresies of two others by name. Paul did a lot of judging and evaluating when it came to false teachers. We are mandated to judge false doctrine.

Jesus in John 7:24 says: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” Jesus is saying “judge without maliciousness and by all means have the facts.” To find a balance between legalism and mysticism we must judge righteous judgment.

First Corinthians 6:3-5 demands that we judge certain matters. We can judge the overt and gross sins mentioned later in verse 9. However our judgment must always be tempered with a desire to restore, not punish.

The goal is restoration.

On a larger note, we can judge qualifications for ministry. We are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 a number of qualifications for eldership. Qualifications are external and we can judge certain externals. Is an elder hospitable, a good teacher, the husband of one wife and so on? Negatively, is he argumentative, or does he have a bad reputation or is he easily angered? These things are easy to see and evaluate.

We can judge qualifications, however we cannot judge qualities. Qualities are internal motivations known only by God Himself.

In John 21:16-17, Jesus said, “Peter, feed my sheep.” The feeding of sheep has to do with external qualifications. We can evaluate a man’s sermons, appraise if he has studied and researched. Lack of preparation will become obvious in time. Poor doctrine or overtly false doctrine is obvious.

But Jesus also said in John 21:15-17, “Peter, do you love me?” This has to do with qualities and internal motivation. Does a man feed the sheep for power? For prestige? For money? Only God knows the motivation. Or is he doing it out of love for Christ? Again, only God knows. If the person is living an ostentatious and lavish lifestyle, those externals all say something and may be an obvious outworking of the inner motivation.

The book of Titus deals with external qualifications for ministry while 1 Timothy 4:16 tells the pastor to judge himself, to take heed to himself, that is, be aware of his inner motivation, his inner qualities.

It does help us to see and understand the difference between the unseen inner qualities and motivations and the external qualifications which can be judged.

*Krino*, as pointed out by Campbell Morgan, changes according to the context. Sometimes you judge, sometimes you do not. We must not be censorious but we cannot give up our right to a careful discrimination when that is required. As Morgan puts it: “The first five verses forbid censoriousness; and the sixth verse insists upon a careful discrimination” (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, pg. 71).

So it is always right to judge false teachers and false teaching using the Word of God as the standard. Nitpicking is one thing. Removing rotten fruit is another. We must be discerning in our discernment and always proceed on the basis of truth and facts leaving the unknown areas of motivation to God.

## **THE LABOR OF DISCERNMENT**

It seems that people have forgotten the word “discernment” and forgotten that encouragements to do the same are found in the Bible (see *Young’s Analytical Concordance to The Bible*, pg. 257). There are two main Greek words translated as “discernment.” One is *anakrino*, meaning to examine or judge closely; the other *diakrino*, to separate out, to investigate, to examine.

This is work. We must put in the work of discernment. We must study to show ourselves approved workmen (2 Timothy 3:16).

D.A. Carson rightly observes:

“We will not go far astray if we approach the Bible with a humble mind and then resolve to focus on central truths. Gradually we will build up our exegetical skills by evenhanded study and a reverent prayerful determination to become like the workman ‘who correctly handles the word of truth’” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, pg. 144).

We must know the rules. We must dust off the hermeneutics textbooks. We must insist on one of the basic rules and that is the rule of context.

The following quotes from Edwin Hartill’s *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* show us the extreme importance of the context rule:

“Torrey — ‘Too much importance cannot be laid upon a close study of the context.’”

“Todd — ‘Consideration of the context in examining any verse or passage is of utmost importance. Failure to do this is one of the causes of misinterpretation of scripture.’”

“Moyer — ‘Too many preachers prepare a message and then hunt a text to fit it. That is not a text, it is a pretext.’”

“Lockhart — ‘The context is the key to the meaning.’” (pg. 80).

Hartill himself says:

“The Bible can be made to prove anything, but NOT when studied in the light of the context” (ibid., pg. 79).

In his classic, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, M.S. Terry insists:

“Many a passage of Scripture will not be understood at all without the help afforded by the context; for many a sentence derives all its point and force from the connexion [sic] in which it stands” (pg. 219).

Benny Hinn can stand up in front of a national audience via television and tell them that the Egyptians were not drowned in the Red Sea but rather were crushed by falling ice (*Praise The Lord Show* 7/14/94). Flying by the seat of his pants he ignores the context of Exodus 14 that talks of the waters coming back over the Egyptians (verse 26) and the waters covering the chariots (verse 28). His followers “ooh” and “aah” over this “new truth.”

By ripping verses out of context, the Word-Faith teachers have created a “Daddy Warbucks” God who is false. All cults trick their followers by wresting verses from their context. In doing so, they twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

Another rule is Contextual Proximity, which broadens the context rule. Thomas Schmidt writes:

“The further distant from the immediate context we travel in search of meaning, the more variables enter in and the more complicated the process becomes. For example, an Old Testament book might illuminate Paul’s meaning, even though it is written in another language and hundreds of years earlier, because we can be confident that Paul knew it and considered it authoritative. On the other hand, a moral philosopher writing in Greek near the time of Paul might use similar words in entirely different ways” (*Straight and Narrow*, pg. 70).

It is also important that we try to understand the biblical world. Background studies in Edershiems’ works are helpful in this. How were the words being used and understood by the people in their world and in their culture? In Dr. Edwin W. Rice’s book, *Orientalisms in Bible Lands* he lays out the disparities in Eastern and Western mind sets:

“For Western people reverse, upset, and completely turn around the customs and habits of Oriental nations. How different must be the thought and expression of the East, growing necessarily out of these opposite ways of life and manners. ... No study of the Bible, therefore, can be satisfactory that does not include some knowledge of life and thought in the East” (pp. 11-12).

A good exegesis will interpret the text and draw out the meaning. Knowing the rules aids us in being good exegetes.

Those that handle the Word of God need to know something about metaphors and similes. They need to be acquainted with Hebrew poetry and parallelisms. Good hermeneutics may be hard work but is an absolute must for anyone who wants to handle the Scriptures with integrity.

## **LIVING IN DISCERNMENT**

Paul spoke of having transformed minds (Romans 12:1). We can best read and understand Scripture when our minds are in the right place and we are in tune with the Savior. Living in discernment is more than just knowing the rules as important as that is. However without the last two considerations we can become, arrogant, and harsh, with a know-it-all attitude. Peter tells us (1 Peter 3:15) that we are to defend our faith with meekness and fear. This indicates a humble attitude in reliance on God. Earlier in that same verse Peter says, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” Two things make that possible:

**A. Love the Savior.** Walk with Christ, commune often with Christ, obey Him, keep your eyes on Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). Fellowship with the author of the Book is vital.

**B. Live with the end in view.** Holding eternity as a present reality gives us God’s perspective of life and the Scriptures.

**Proper discernment is our privilege and right. The work is worth the effort and the reward will be not only the favor and blessing of God but our ability to truly enrich the lives of others.**

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## **LIES FOR THE GLORY OF GOD?**

Lee Grady, self-critical publisher of the American magazine “Charisma”, wrote the following after the double-life of Todd Bentley ended in shambles:

*A prominent Pentecostal evangelist...said to me: ‘I’m now convinced that a large segment of the charismatic church will follow the anti-Christ when he shows up because they have no discernment’* (“Life After Lakeland: Sorting out the Confusion” in <http://fireinmybones.com/>, 13 August, 2008).

A recent edition of *ideaSpektrum* (the weekly magazine of the German Evangelical Alliance) reports that youth pastor Michael Guglielmucci of one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Australia has been exposed as a liar. He faked a cancer disease for two years in order to cover up his real problem, a long-term addiction to pornography (*ideaSpektrum*, 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, p. 35).

One of the most popular Pentecostal evangelists of the 1970s and 1980s, Jimmy Swaggart, had similar problems. He experienced a vision during his Spirit-baptism in his teen years that apparently fulfilled itself. Years later he was forced to painfully admit his life long addiction to pornography and that this often drove him to prostitutes.

Paul Cain was one of the mainstays of the prophetic movement. He received astonishing revelations. John Wimber claimed that Cain was a prophet that never erred. Later it came out that he was a homosexual and alcoholic.

Roberts Liardon presented great Pentecostal miracle-healers in his book “God’s Generals”. He was banned from the pulpit for three months because of his homosexual relationship with his youth pastor. This book is actually – apart from a few exceptions – a disturbing documentation of the errors and escapades of these so-called “generals”, whose gross heresies are often played down or painted in a positive light. One of the “glorious” characters mentioned in the book is William Branham. Lee Grady, quoted above, complains in this context:

*Branham embraced horrible deception near the end of his ministry before he died in 1965. He claimed that he was the reincarnation of Elijah - and his strange doctrines are still embraced by a cultlike following today. When Bentley announced to the world that the same angel that ushered in the 1950s healing revival had come to Lakeland, the entire audience should have run for the exits* (ibid).

Fabricated reports of healing and other dishonesties are, unfortunately, not very seldom in many of the “super-spiritual” circles.

Evangelical missionaries call this “transcendental trickery” – where one imagines it possible to help “faith” with invented miracles and healings.

A sad example of this problem is the mother of David Berg, who founded several churches based on a false claim to a miraculous healing. Apparently this “recipe” was successful. Simply make up, for example, a story of healing or some other wonder, exaggerate more or less about it and “church growth” will come about (Deborah Davis, “The Children of God – The Inside Story”, Zondervan, 1984).

But God is not mocked. David Berg later called himself Moses David und became the founding father of the “Children of God”. This philosophy that the end justifies the means took one of its worst developments in this movement. Moses David sent his female disciples out to the streets to do “flirty fishing”, i.e., for prostitution, so that they could be “bait for Jesus”.

The worldly media delighted in exploiting this tragic development. Only God knows how much reproach and shame was heaped upon the name of our Savior through it all.

“Truth is decorative, though not necessarily useful for success.” (German: *Wahrhaftigkeit ist eine Zier, doch weiter kommt man nicht mit ihr*). This may have been, to a certain degree, the philosophy of Kathryn Kuhlman, of whom it be claimed that she prepared the way for the Holy Spirit like no one else. She conducted healing ministries and popularized the phenomenon of being “slain in the Spirit” towards the end of the 1960s.

Her biographer and follower, Jamie Buckingham, writes:

*It was her special joy to lead the media astray... She lied, though deathly ill, about her age to her doctor. To the end this pride dominated her life... That was the inexplicable trait of hers that she kept till death. Even though she was in her late sixties she insisted that her radio announcer introduce her with the words: "And now, Kathryn Kuhlman, the young woman who you have been waiting for" ...Kathryn was a loner. She rejected the counsel of her friends. Submission was something foreign to her, especially when it meant to submit to a man or to a group of men (Jamie Buckingham, "Kathryn Kuhlman", [Daughter of Destiny], Verlag Johannes Fix, 1979, pp. 16, 83 and 85, translated from the German version).*

Much weightier is the fact that she lied to the world about her broken marriage with the already divorced Pentecostal preacher Burroughs Waltrip.

*During her interview with Robert Hoyt from the Akron "Beacon Journal" she denied to have ever been married at all. "We were never married. I never made a marriage vow",... She raised her finger threateningly and screamed at the reporter: "That is the truth, God help me" (ibid, p. 132).*

A sad record was set by Peter Popoff. This self-styled Pentecostal healing-evangelist claimed to receive special messages and words of knowledge from God and called himself a prophet with the gift of healing. Popoff could reveal amazing details about the individuals who came seeking healing and help, like their name, address, age, detailed malady cases, etc.

This went on until a miniature radio receiver was found hidden in his ear – and that his wife radioed him all the information. But he was not exposed by one of the several thousand more or less Charismatic visitors, among whom one would expect to find the gift of discernment of spirits.

An atheist, James Randi, figured it out. It is well known that the children of this world are more wise than the children of light (Luke 16:8).

Randi dedicated himself to take a closer look at such faith healers. In 1987 he published *The Faith Healers*, a sort of standard reference work about this phenomena, (Richard Mayhue, "The Healing Promise", Harvest House Publishers, pp. 44-45). When Randi presented his discoveries about these deceptions, Popoff countered: "He is of the devil"!

This is the frequent reaction of super-spiritual faith healers when anyone questions their "signs and wonders". Yet even after this expose the American magazine *Charisma* printed whole-page ads and Christians gave money to this "man of God". Why is it that so many believers can be so gullible?

Another Pentecostal healer who intended to help faith along with questionable means was W.V. Grant. He could also call people by their names, lengthen their legs and produce other apparently astonishing miracles. But finally it became clear that it was all staged. Actors among the audience imitated diseases and then the healing. Those who could miraculously stand up from a wheelchair could already walk without a wheelchair before the event, as it was later discovered (CIB Bulletin, Jan. 1992).

Such "wheelchair-healings" during mass evangelistic meetings are a favorite. A missionary to Africa who recently accompanied me to Tanzania related that his children were eyewitnesses of a Reinhard Bonnke evangelistic campaign near the slums of Nairobi. They sat in some kind of balcony towards the side and realized how a healthy person sitting in a wheelchair was pushed to the front. With much excitement and joyful hallelujahs the "healed man" jumped from his chair. This led to the "conversion" of many. The children were upset and confronted the representative of Bonnke's missions agency, CfaN (Christ for all the Nations) that this was deception. But he had no problems with this kind of "preaching", since it creates and strengthens faith in many.

Pastor Helmut Weidemann, who investigated the objective, medical evidence of a supposed and widely publicized faith healing through Reinhard Bonnke here in Germany, commented later with resignation: "I have never seen so much dishonesty in my life."

The magazine "Aufatmen", in reference to Benny Hinn and his book about the Holy Spirit and healings, stated:

*A spokesman of the hospital involved considers Hinn's statements to be forgeries. Neither medical records nor statements of co-workers from back then or now exist that could substantiate these claims ("Aufatmen", 2/92, p. 77).*

Also the story “Heavenly Man” (Br. Yun) has turned out to be more fantasy and deception than fact. But the Chinese man Yun has made a fortune through this book.

We could extend this list almost indefinitely. Nobody would claim that deception and seduction are present with every follower of this movement. People like Lee Grady and many others wage a decided war against this kind of untruthfulness in their own ranks.

Even in non-Charismatic groups similar problems of dishonesty, double standards and hypocrisy are on the rise. One must wake up to the fact that a spirit of lies spreads in the world, in denominations and in churches and that apparently many, even believers, really want to be deceived.

Elias Schrenk, the pioneer of evangelism on German soil, made a memorable observation about the rise of the infiltrating Pentecostal movement of his day which aptly applies to the popular hierarchy of today, esp. to the TV faith healers and “revival preachers”:

*I would rejoice in a movement that can be purified and that can be proven to be*

*a genuine movement from God. But I am strongly convinced that you cannot cleanse a movement that is so obviously involved in so many lies as this movement is* (Paul Fleisch, “Geschichte der Pfingstbewegung”, [A History of the Pentecostal Movement], Francke-Buchhandlung GmbH, 1983, p. 169).

Especially when people attempt to spin and trim the obviously unfulfilled prophecies – which were boastfully proclaimed in the name of the Lord – long and hard enough so that they can somehow be shown to be vindicated after all, one cannot escape the conclusion that this is not the work of the Holy Spirit who is known as a Spirit of Truth.

Reinhard Bonnke, for example, proclaimed during his “fire conference” in Frankfurt 1987 that a great outpouring of the Spirit in Europe and Germany was imminent. What has happened since? An outpouring of deceiving spirits according to 2. Thess. 2:11. Europe is experiencing an unparalleled invasion of the occult and the New-Age. Instead of admitting that one is a false prophet, these “superspiritual” preachers twist like a snake in all imaginable directions and pull out all the stops in the art of concealment.

As an unbiased witness, the British pastor Keith Parker, counting himself to be a Charismatic, stated concerning a specific prophesy given by the late John Wimber:

*The time came and went. No revival happened. Instead of confessing that he had misled God’s people, he denied that the prediction had been made, or else, that we had misinterpreted what had been written. After this, I felt that Wimber, and his ‘prophets’ had disqualified themselves, and I felt it save to ignore, anything, that came from that source* (Keith Parker, “Prophets True or False? Signs and Wonders Real or Bogus?”, p. 4).

All this all is a reminder of the complaint by Richard Krüger, the former president of the German Pentecostal Theological Seminary “Beröa”: *The prophets seldom or rarely admit errors, exaggerations or sky-high wishes* (ideaSpektrum, 4/2002).

But the Word of God says: “And her prophets...seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken” (Ezekiel 22:28).

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## **Other links on Cults & False teaching:**

- \* [www.reveal.org/links/index.html](http://www.reveal.org/links/index.html)
- \* Watchman Fellowship Int. [www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org)
- \* Let us reason: [www.letusreason.org](http://www.letusreason.org)
- \* The Banner :[www.banner.org](http://www.banner.org)
- \* Personal Freedom Outreach: [www.pfo.org](http://www.pfo.org)
- \* Deception in the church: [www.deceptioninthechurch.com](http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com)
- \* Biblical Discernment Ministries: [www.discernment.org](http://www.discernment.org)
- \* Fake Faith healers: [www.fakefaithhealers.org](http://www.fakefaithhealers.org)
- \* Dangerous Doctrines: <http://ctouch.org.in/cults.htm>

**Titus 2:1. “ You must teach what is in accord with  
sound doctrine.”**

**Jude 3. “ Defend the faith once for all delivered  
to the saints....”**

**Compiled and edited by A.Othniel**