

THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT

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Matthew 7:6

1. Like many other difficult passages in the Bible, this verse is rarely referenced or dealt with.
2. The fact that it follows Jesus' teaching on the subject of being judgmental is important because it clearly shows that Jesus did not mean that we should never exercise discernment or pass judgment.
3. Dealing with people and determining where they are coming from, what motivates them, and what are their objectives requires us to exercise discernment and to be discriminating.
4. The Gospel is holy and precious, and we must treat it as holy and precious.
5. Many people are predators, and because they are we need to exercise wisdom.

I. It is significant that Jesus would characterize human being in these terms.

- A. When Jesus spoke He always spoke for God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. 29 "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." John 8:28-30
- B. Based on this reality we can say with full assurance that there are people in this world that God views as animals.
- C. Incredibly both Peter and Jude refer to some people in the church as unreasoning animals (brute beasts). Jude 8-13 (See also 2 Peter 2:9-22)
Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, **like unreasoning animals**, by these things they are destroyed. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. 12 **These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves**; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; 13 wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.
- D. The terms Jesus used here need to be understood.
 1. In referring to dogs He was not talking about domestic pets, rather He was referring to vicious opportunists who devour and take advantage of others.
 2. His use of the word swine referenced people who are unclean, without appreciation and discernment, and ruled by their appetites.
- E. Jesus used similar terms at other times.
 1. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Matthew 7:15
 2. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the

prophets.' 31 "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?" Matthew 23:29-33

NOTE: God did not create men and women to be ruled by their appetites and desires.

II. The fact that Jesus referred to people in this way should serve as a warning to those who call themselves Christians while embracing the things of the world.

A. God expects to be taken seriously. Hebrews 10:23-31

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

B. Another passage in Hebrews reinforces the fact that God expects us to take our relationship with Him seriously. Hebrews 2:1-4

For this reason (the supremacy of Christ) we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 **how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?** After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

III. True followers of Jesus Christ need spiritual discernment when dealing with people.

A. We are to "speak the truth in love," but we are to speak the truth. Ephesians 4:15

B. Paul wrote, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." Colossians 4:5-6

NOTE: I would add that we should conduct ourselves with wisdom toward insiders as well because they are not always what they appear to be.

C. At times we must confront those who oppose the truth or deny the truth just as Paul did the Jews in Pisidian Antioch. Acts 13:44-46

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."

D. Note three related passages in Proverbs.

1. Proverbs 9:7-9

He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. 8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise

man and he will love you. 9 Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning.

2. Proverbs 23:9

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

3. Proverbs 26:4-5

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. 5 Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.

APPLICATION

1. We live in a day when the message proclaimed by many churches could be described as, "Sugar and spice and everything nice."

2. I believe that we are living in the day that Paul described in 2 Timothy 3:1-7.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 6 For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

3. Our job is to faithfully represent God in the church and in the culture. 2 Timothy 4:1-5

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they (many professing Christians) will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

4. If we are truly being led by the Holy Spirit we will do and say what He wants done and said.

5. If we do we will be pleasing to God but often displeasing to people.