
THOU SHALT JUDGE



JUSTIN PETERS
TODD FRIEL

Table of Contents

<i>Lesson 1: The Need for Discernment</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Lesson 2: Judge Not, Lest You Be Judged</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Lesson 3: Naming Names</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Lesson 4: What is Discernment.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Lesson 5: The Heart of Discernment.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Lesson 6: Growing in Discernment</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Lesson 7: Judging Publicly.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Lesson 8: Theological Levels of Discernment.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Lesson 9: Heretic, False Teacher, or Deceived</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Lesson 10: Degrees of Separation</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Lesson 11: Discernment of the Home.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Lesson 12: When and How Should I Judge My Elder</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Lesson 13: Discernment of the Self.....</i>	<i>46</i>

Students Guide without answers - Page 50 and following

How to Use This Curriculum

It can be difficult to practice discernment well, and many Christians wonder if it is even necessary. While there are unhelpful extremes that should be avoided, biblical discernment applied well is extremely important. God commands us to judge with righteous judgment. Beyond being obedient, discernment is important because false teaching distorts the Gospel, it robs the Christian of spiritual growth, and it entices the unregenerate to false hope and damnation. We must love and defend the truth of God for His glory, for the good of the church, and for the souls of the lost.

Curriculum Components

Thou Shalt Judge Digital Series

This curriculum is based on Thou Shalt Judge, a 13-episode video series. Each video is approximately 20 minutes and invites students to explore and discuss various aspects of biblical discernment.

Study Guide

The study guide provides a place for students to engage with their assumptions and expand their knowledge and understanding as they are challenged by the content of this curriculum. This can become a valuable tool as they find themselves being confronted by poor or false teaching. The guide presents six questions for each episode and space to record their answers and take additional notes during discussion.

The student's copy without answers is found at the end of this guide starting at page 50. The lessons with answers should act as a teacher's or facilitator's guide. Print out several copies of the second section for all students and the teacher can just print one copy for himself of the entire guide.

Videos and Questions

Each lesson has six questions the students should answer after watching the videos. Then engage the students in discussion using the teacher's guide with answers.

Conclusion

Use whatever time remains to answer questions, make announcements, and to close in prayer.

Discussion Tips

The strength of this curriculum depends on the engagement of the students with the ideas presented. Use the discussion time to guide students to think about what they believe, why they believe it, and how it lines up with truth. Use the following discussion tips to help you lead fruitful discussion:

- Discussion is most fruitful when a majority of students are involved. Manage students as necessary to draw out those who are quieter and keep the more vocal from dominating the conversation.
- Create an environment where students feel safe to share their thoughts and experiences without judgment or ridicule.
- While you need to be aware of your time, do not cut short a discussion that seems especially engaging to the students. Invest your time where the students respond best.
- Have a plan, but be flexible enough to allow the students to guide the discussion. In this way you will learn what aspects they are most concerned with.
- Use the students' answers to the questions, especially if they changed their answers, to launch discussion.
- Use the main ideas provided as prompts for discussion. Ask whether students agree with certain statements in the video. Encourage thoughtful explanations.
- Ask questions that require thoughtful answers.
- Avoid leading questions; the goal of discussion is not to receive correct answers, but to lead students to think about their answers
- Be prepared to offer correction to false ideas, especially toward the end of the curriculum, but when possible, guide students to discover for themselves the flaws in their thinking

Sample Schedule

Below is a sample schedule based on one and a half hour of class time. Exact timing will vary with segment lengths and success of discussion.

6:00–6:10	Open, introduction, and prayer
6:10–6:35	Watch video lesson
6:35–6:55	Have students answer all questions on their own
6:55–7:20	Discuss each question as a class
7:20–7:30	Wrap-up, answer questions, make announcements, close in prayer

Lesson 1:

The Need for Discernment

Introduction:

It can be difficult to practice discernment well, and many Christians wonder if it is even necessary. While there are unhelpful extremes that should be avoided, biblical discernment applied well is extremely important. God commands us to judge with righteous judgment. Beyond being obedient, discernment is important because false teaching distorts the Gospel, it robs the Christian of spiritual growth, and it entices the unregenerate to false hope and damnation. We must love and defend the truth of God for His glory, for the good of the Church, and for the souls of the lost.

Questions:

Read John 7:24

1. What contrast is drawn in this verse?

The contrast here is how the judgment is done. Judging by appearance is set in contrast to judging righteously.

2. What command is given?

Judge with righteous judgment.

3. What does it mean to judge with righteous judgment?

In context of the verse, righteous judgment is specifically contrasted with judging by appearance. Practically, it means that we are to judge according to right standards (the Bible) with right motives and in the right way. We will discuss these ideas more in future episodes.

Questions:

Read Titus 1:10–14

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: Most letters include this information in the opening verses.

Paul wrote to Titus to instruct him in ordering the churches of Crete.

2. What did Paul say must be done with the deceivers?

They must be silenced, rebuked sharply.

3. What is the danger that leads to the necessity of this action?

They are harming families by their false teaching.

4. What is the hope of rebuke?

That they would be sound in the faith. The goal of judgment is that those in error would repent and those being deceived would know truth.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:11–13

1. Who wrote this letter, and to whom was it written?

Hint: Most letters include this information in the opening verses.

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth.

2. What are the Corinthians instructed to do in verse 11?

To avoid associating with professing Christians who are characterized by sin.

3. How do you see discernment in these verses?

Discernment occurs in distinguishing between Christians and those of the world, as well as in judging the Christian for his sinful behaviors.

Summary Questions:

1. What do you typically think of when you hear the words “discernment” or “judgment”? How did Todd use the terms differently than you are accustomed to?

Discuss answers, encouraging honesty and reflection. It is likely that the terms are typically seen as having a negative connotation, especially judgment. Discuss how Todd used the terms and ensure everyone is using the same definitions throughout the study.

2. How has this episode caused you to think differently about the dangers of false teaching and the need for discernment?

Encourage discussion, using the conversation to review the points made in the video.

3. What was most surprising or most impactful about Todd’s discussion of the need for discernment?

Encourage discussion, using the conversation to review the points made in the video.

Lesson 2:

Judge Not, Lest You Be Judged

Introduction:

Matthew 7:1 is one of the most familiar passages of Scripture, but it is also one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Bible. The Bible does not prohibit judgment; it warns against hypocritical judgment. Throughout the Bible, righteous judgment—or discernment—is encouraged and even commanded. Many Christians argue that judgment is divisive among believers. But discernment doesn't divide—false teaching does. Discernment, righteous judgment, and church discipline are ultimately acts of love, seeking repentance and restoration and protecting the unity of the body of Christ.

Questions:

Read Matthew 7:1–5

1. How have you used (or heard someone use) Matthew 7:1?

Discuss answers. This is one of the most familiar verses in the Bible, but it is commonly used out of context and applied incorrectly.

2. How does reading the verse in context affect your understanding of this verse or its application?

Encourage participants to evaluate their own thinking about the verse. When taken in context, this verse does not mean that Christians should not judge. Rather, it warns the Christian not to be hypocritical in their judgment.

Questions:

Read Matthew 7:15–20

1. Who is speaking in this passage?

Jesus

2. In what way does this passage teach that judgment is necessary?

Jesus warns his disciples to beware false prophets, implying that they must discern who are the false prophets.

3. What are we supposed to judge?

False prophets/teachers.

4. By what means are we to judge?

By their fruits.

5. How can a lack of judgment be dangerous?

A lack of judgment is dangerous because we will be unable to identify the false prophets and beware of them.

Read Romans 16:17–18.

1. According to this Scripture, what is it that causes division?

Those who teach contrary to sound doctrine; those who do not serve Jesus.

2. How does this inform our perception of discernment?

Discernment is important for the unity of the church. We must recognize the false teachers and avoid them so that we will not be deceived by their smooth and flattering speech.

Summary Questions:

1. How would you respond to the claim that we should not judge?

Encourage thoughtful responses using the ideas and Scriptures referenced in this lesson.

2. What would be an example of hypocritical judgment? What would be an example of judging with righteous judgment? How can you determine if it is right to judge in a given scenario?

Allow discussion, offering specific examples. Guide discussion toward practical ideas for considering one's own life and heart before judging another.

3. What would you do if you were to discover that a brother in Christ was involved in underhanded business practices? How has this study impacted your answer to this question?

Discuss answers, emphasizing that the specific applications may vary from situation to situation. Consider whether you are qualified to judge (i.e., not being hypocritical) and have the right motivation (i.e., restoration). If so, follow the pattern of Matthew 18:15–20.

Lesson 3:

Naming Names

Introduction:

Evangelical Christians today shy away from calling out false teachers by name. In the zeal to emphasize Christian kindness and gentleness, many have failed to follow the biblical mandate to protect against false teachers. The Bible and church history are rife with examples of false teachers being identified by name for the purpose of calling them to repentance, warning the flock of ravenous wolves, and restoring those who have been led astray. False teaching is a serious issue with eternal consequences. Therefore, naming false teachers is not an unnecessary cruelty, but a biblical act of love toward all believers.

Questions:

1. Read each passage and determine why the author warned against the individual(s) named. How was the warning meant to protect the believers?

2 Timothy 2:17–18

Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching that the resurrection had already happened. This teaching was hurting people's faith.

2 Timothy 4:10

Demas was in love with the world. This announcement warned believers to no longer follow Demas' example and to guard themselves from the love of the world.

2 Timothy 4:14–15

Alexander opposed the message of the Gospel and did harm to Paul. Paul wanted Timothy and others to beware of his opposition.

3 John 9–10

Diotrephes was arrogant, selfish, and rebellious. John was warning the people not to listen to his wicked nonsense.

Questions:

Read Ephesians 5:11

1. What did Paul instruct the Ephesians to do about works of darkness?

Take no part in them but expose them.

2. Why is it important to expose the works of darkness, considering the context around this verse?

We are to walk as children of light; the works of darkness are shameful.

Read 1 Timothy 5:19–20

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom was it written, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider the opening of the letter (1 Timothy 1:1–7)

Paul wrote to Timothy to teach and encourage him to establish and strengthen the church in Ephesus. Specifically, Paul instructed him to defend against false doctrine and false teachers.

2. Who is “those” referring to in 1 Timothy 5:20?

Elders

3. How are the elders who persist in sin to be dealt with?

Rebuke them publicly.

4. What purpose for public rebuke did Paul give?

So that everyone else will not want to go on sinning; for the conviction and repentance of all.

5. How does this instruction inform the topic of naming false teachers?

Paul specified that these elders were to be called out publicly for the good of all who listened to them. Thus, not only is it acceptable, it is in some cases necessary.

Summary Questions:

1. When should we teach/correct privately and when should we name names?

Discuss answers, using examples if helpful. Private correction is most useful with those who are true Christians, teach primarily sound doctrine, and strive to live God-honoring lives. Public sin, pervasive false teaching, or persistent/unrepentant sin may require public rebuke.

2. How does naming false teachers show love to:

Other believers? Warns them of danger.

Sound teachers? Protects them from needlessly worrying if they are the ones being alluded to when names are not named.

False teachers? Exposes their sin and calls them to repentance.

3. One objection to naming false teachers is that we would be throwing stones from glass houses. How would you respond to this objection?

Discuss answers. There is a difference in making a mistake or being ignorant and loving heresy. We have an obligation to mark false teachers.

Lesson 4:

What is Discernment

Introduction:

Discernment is the ability to distinguish between truth and error or what is right and wrong. This characteristic is emphasized throughout the Bible and every Christian is instructed to practice biblical discernment. Like the Bereans did, we should study the Word of God, receive teaching with an engaged mind, and test what we hear by the Scriptures. False teachers desire blind followers who do not think for themselves; God wants us to be thoughtful and discerning so that we may approve what is excellent.

Questions:

Read 1 Kings 3:5–12

1. Who was speaking, and to whom, in verses 6–9?

Solomon

2. What was the occasion for this exchange?

Hint: look back to chapter 2 for the full context.

Solomon had been anointed king after David. God appeared to Solomon and asked what he would like God to give him.

3. What was the king asking for, and for what purpose was he asking for it?

Solomon asked for an understanding mind so that he would be able to govern well and be able to discern good from evil.

4. What does the Bible indicate about the worthiness of this request?

This was a worthy request and pleased God, so that he granted the request as well as the earthly blessings that Solomon had not requested.

Questions:

Read Proverbs 2:1–15

1. What is the writer encouraging the reader to seek?

Wisdom

2. How does the use of repetition and synonyms emphasize the point of this passage?

Nearly every line uses the term wisdom, understanding, insight, knowledge, or discretion. This repetition emphasizes the value of biblical wisdom.

3. By what means does the writer encourage the reader to pursue wisdom (v. 1-4)?

He is to listen for it, pursue it, seek it, and ask God for it. He is to seek it as valuable hidden treasure.

4. Why does the writer think it is important to seek wisdom and discernment (v. 5, 9–15)?

It is necessary for understanding the fear of the Lord, knowing what is good and righteous and just, and guarding the path of the righteous.

Read Philippians 1:9–11

1. Who is the author and the audience of this passage?

Hint: look at Philippians 1:1

Paul (and Timothy) wrote to the saints in Philippi.

2. What is the relationship between love and knowledge/discernment in these verses?

Paul links love with knowledge and discernment. As love grows, so does knowledge and discernment.

Questions:

Philippians 1:9–11 (continued)

3. How does abounding in love with discernment benefit in the present?

It equips us to recognize what is excellent.

4. What eternal benefit comes from the application of such discernment?

Being pure and blameless for the day of Christ (and thereby glory to God).

Summary Questions:

1. Who should be practicing discernment? How can you grow in discernment?

Encourage participants to recognize that every believer should be practicing discernment. We grow in discernment by seeking God, studying His Word, listening to sound teaching, and checking what we hear against Scripture.

2. How can studying what is true help us discern what is false? Have you ever encountered an idea that may have seemed true or harmless at first but later proved false and dangerous? How can knowledge of false ideas help the Christian be discerning?

Discuss answers. Like dealing with counterfeit money, it is important to know what is true so that you will recognize when something is “off.” Encourage discussion of lies and deceptions that may be difficult to distinguish from truth. Discuss how being aware of false ideas can make it easier to catch.

3. If you hear a new teacher or an unfamiliar teaching, what steps would you take to determine if you should accept it as true?

Discuss ideas, encouraging practical and specific steps. Ultimately, any new teaching ought to be checked against Scripture.

Lesson 5:

The Heart of Discernment

Introduction:

While it is important that we correct false teaching, it is equally important that we do not fall into the ditch of extreme severity in how we judge. We must not lose sight of the biblical heart of discernment. Our concern is for the truth of God's Word, but also for the spiritual well-being of those involved. True biblical discernment is driven by a love for God, a love for truth, and a love for people—both the deceived and the deceiver. It's not just about being right; it's about being Christ-like.

Questions:

Read 2 Timothy 2:24–26

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider 2 Timothy 1:1–2

Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage and equip him to lead the church in Ephesus.

2. What do these verses teach about the role of the Lord's servant?

He teaches, he corrects, he endures evil.

3. What do these verses teach about the manner of the Lord's servant?

He is not quarrelsome, he is kind and gentle, and he is patient. He is concerned not just with what he teaches, but how he teaches it.

4. What hope does correction bring regarding false teachers?

The hope is that even the false teachers might repent and be led into truth, thus escaping the devil.

Questions:

Read Jude 22-23

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider verses 1-3

Jude wrote to Christians (“those who are called”) to encourage them to contend for the faith.

2. What three groups of people are described in verses 22-23?

Those who doubt, those who are in the midst of the fire, and those whose garments are stained by the flesh. These describe people who are engaged at various levels with false doctrine, whether being caused to waver in their faith, being deceived, or saturated in the deception.

3. What is the attitude of the one contending for the faith to be toward those who are wrong?

The term “mercy” is repeated. Correction is included, as indicated in snatching them from the fire, but mercy is given even to those whose garments we hate.

4. What concern drives the correction in these verses?

The concern is for the people who have been deceived by what is false.

Read 1 Timothy 1:3-6

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider 1 Timothy 1:1-3

Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage and equip him to lead the church in Ephesus.

2. Why did Paul encourage Timothy to stay at Ephesus?

To charge certain false teachers not to teach what is false.

3. In verse 5, what is “our charge”?

To demand the false teachers to stop teaching what is false.

Questions:

1 Timothy 1:3–6 (continued)

4. What did Paul identify as the aim and motivation for this charge?

Love.

5. What does it mean for correction to issue from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith?

Encourage discussion, including practical examples. Paul and Timothy were not judging or demanding correction because of pride, anger, or jealousy, but because they held true concern for the brothers, wanted the false teachers to repent, and wanted the saving Gospel to be rightly understood.

6. How do verses 6 and 7 help us to understand the consequences of wrongly motivated judgment?

These verses describe someone who is driven by pride. They lack understanding themselves, and their discussions are not beneficial.

Summary Questions:

1. If I am judging something that is clearly unbiblical, why does my motivation or manner matter?

Biblical discernment is not just about being right; it's about being Christ-like. While unbiblical teachings need to be corrected, if my motivation and manner are not righteous, then I am not the one to do the correcting (at least not until I have dealt with my own faults).

2. What biblical examples should we follow in making judgments?

Consider Jesus and Paul, among others. Discuss the context of each example, identifying the marks we can model.

3. How does thinking about the people (the false teacher as well as those led astray) help to frame judgment in a more biblical way?

It's easy to be abrupt and academic when thinking about an idea or a teaching. But when we think about the people involved, our concern becomes personal, and our actions are motivated and tempered by love.

Lesson 6:

Growing in Discernment

Introduction:

Discernment is vital to the Christian life and instrumental in our spiritual growth. Without discernment, we will be like “children, tossed to and fro by the waves” (Ephesians 4:14). We must know what we believe and why we believe it. Biblical discernment directly corresponds with spiritual maturity. Discernment is necessary for growth and is an indicator that growth has occurred. A perpetual lack of discernment may be an indicator of spiritual death.

Questions:

Read Ephesians 4:11–16

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Paul wrote to the saints (i.e., Christians) at Ephesus.

2. What role did God give spiritual leaders?

To equip the saints for ministry and to facilitate the building up of the body of Christ.

3. What should every believer strive for?

Unity of the faith and spiritual maturity.

4. How does Paul describe the spiritually immature?

Using the analogy of children, Paul described spiritual babies as unstable (tossed to and fro) and easily deceived (carried about by every wind).

5. What does a lack of discernment imply about a believer?

For someone who is truly a believer, a lack of discernment is a sign of immaturity and a weak spiritual foundation.

Questions:

Read Hebrews 5:11–14

1. Who wrote this book and to whom?

Hint: where do we find this information in other New Testament epistles?

Most epistles include the author and audience in the opening salutation. Hebrews does not offer any such greeting. There are some clues in the closing verses, such as: the writer knew Timothy, was probably in Italy, and was writing to Christians (i.e., brothers). The Bible does not clearly reveal who was writing or precisely who was the intended audience.

2. What admonishment did the writer give in these verses?

The writer rebuked the people for their lack of spiritual maturity.

3. How does the analogy used here parallel Paul's analogy in Ephesians 4:11–16?

Like Paul did in Ephesians, the writer of Hebrews used the analogy of children to reveal the lack of maturity among the believers. In Ephesians, the children were easily persuaded by whatever they heard; in Hebrews, the Christians are still drinking milk like babies, instead of learning to sustain themselves on solid food.

4. What mark is given for the mature Christian in verse 14?

The mature Christian is marked by discernment, being trained through practice to distinguish good from evil.

5. What does verse 14 imply about discernment?

Because discernment is something that is trained through continual practice, the implication is that discernment is something that the Christian should do, and it should be done often (continually, even). It is a vital part of Christian maturity.

Questions:

Read Romans 1:28–31

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Hint: Where do we find this information in most epistles?

Romans 1:1 tells us that Paul wrote this letter and verse 7 tells us that he was writing to the saints (i.e., Christians) in Rome.

2. Who are “they” in verse 28?

Looking back at the context starting in verse 18, it appears “they” are people who have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. These are those who have rejected God.

3. How is your perception of discernment impacted by knowing that a lack of discernment is included in this list of unrighteousness?

Note: the term translated as “without discernment” may be translated in other versions as “foolish”, “without understanding”, “senseless”, etc.

Discuss reactions to the inclusion of this trait in the list of sins. Discernment is important to the life of a believer, and a perpetual lack of discernment may be an indicator of spiritual death.

Summary Questions:

1. How has the link between discernment and spiritual maturity changed the way you view the role of discernment in the life of the believer?

Discuss the importance of discernment to the Christian life and how perceptions have shifted because of this episode.

2. To what extent have you considered discernment in your evaluation of your own spiritual maturity? Will you reconsider how you view spiritual maturity as a result of today's discussion?

Many Christians may think of spiritual maturity in terms of the number of years they have been saved, how regularly they practice spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study, or how many Bible trivia questions they can answer. Encourage discussion regarding how ideas and perceptions have shifted by considering one's power of discernment as a sign of maturity.

3. What does it mean to constantly practice discernment? How will you train your powers of discernment?

This does not mean that you must do nothing but publicly call out false teachers or to be harsh in revealing what is wrong. But every Christian should be practicing discernment in their own lives. Every time we hear a sermon, listen to song lyrics, observe an advertisement, watch a movie, receive advice, or hear a pithy saying or word of encouragement, it is an opportunity to practice discernment, filtering through what aligns with the truth of Scripture and what does not.

Lesson 7:

Judging Publicly

Introduction:

There are times when false teaching needs to be denounced publicly. But there are rules that guide how to do it well. John Newton offered several poignant considerations in his letter to a fellow pastor. He charged his friend to consider his opponent, his audience, and himself. From Newton's encouragement, we can glean helpful rules to help us speak the truth in love, edifying all involved rather than facilitating harm.

Questions:

Read Galatians 2:11–14

1. Who is “I” in this passage?

Paul. Authorship is revealed in the opening verses of the letter.

2. What was Cephas (a.k.a., Peter) doing that required opposition?

He was acting hypocritically in a way that was out of step with the Gospel. Even though the Gospel is for all people, when the Jews came around, Peter acted like there was a distinction and that the Jews must remain separated from the Gentiles.

3. Who witnessed this correction?

Paul corrected Peter “before them all.” This likely would have included everyone who was affected by his actions: the circumcision party (the Jews Peter wanted to be accepted by), the Jewish Christians who were led astray by Peter's actions (including Barnabas), and the Gentile Christians who were victim of Peter's hypocrisy.

Questions:

Galatians 2:11–14 (continued)

4. Why did Peter's actions require public opposition?

Peter's actions were contrary to the Gospel, sending the wrong message to the Gentiles, leading astray even seemingly mature Christians, and accommodating the false ideas of an influential group. Because many were affected by Peter's error, it required a public rebuke so that all would benefit from the correction.

Read Ephesians 4:11–16

1. What does the transition word at the beginning of verse 15 tell us?

Verse 15 begins with a transition that indicates that what comes next contrasts what came before. The verses leading up to verse 15 discuss spiritual immaturity and the tendency to be deceived. So "speaking the truth in love" (or discernment) is offered as the alternative for spiritual immaturity.

2. What is the relationship between truth and love?

Truth and love are equally necessary. We are called to speak the truth, but that calling is qualified by the manner in which we speak truth. Love without truth is not true love, and speaking truth without love is often dangerous and rarely beneficial.

3. What does the rest of the sentence suggest about the reason for and result of teaching the truth?

The context goes on to talk about the body of Christ. The body of Christ grows, building itself up in love, when all parts are working properly. Speaking the truth in love is a benefit to the church collectively, not just to the individuals who are delivered from false teaching.

Questions:

Read Jude 17–23

1. How are the scoffers described?

They cause divisions, are worldly, and are devoid of the Spirit.

2. What imperative are we given? How are we to be different?

We are to keep ourselves in the love of God.

3. How are both “speaking truth” and “love” present in this charge to believers?

Verse 22 implies that we are speaking truth as we seek to save those who have been deceived, but verse 21 shows that being characterized by love is what separates us from the false teachers.

4. Which of the rules for public rebuke do you find most instructive? Most challenging?

Encourage thoughtful and honest discussion.

5. How might you go about applying these rules next time you see a false idea or teaching that needs to be corrected?

Discuss answers, encouraging specific applications. For instance, you could set a definitive amount of time to pray, write a draft before you engage and have a godly friend check it for any personal bitterness, make a list of things the individual does right, etc.

6. Though these rules were recommended for public rebuke, how could they benefit private disagreements?

Discuss the benefits of the rules when applied to a private situation. Though these rules are necessary for public rebuke, they are wise principles for engaging in any disagreement or rebuke. Private encounters also provide good training grounds to practice these principles.

Lesson 8:

Theological Levels of Discernment

Introduction:

There is nothing more important than studying theology, but not all points of Christian theology are of equal importance and have equal ramifications. The discerning Christian must be able to categorize issues of error and disagreement into three levels. Issues of primary importance are those essential to Christian orthodoxy. Secondary issues are important, but genuine believers may land on different sides of the question. Issues of tertiary (i.e., third) importance are areas that are fun to debate but have little impact on our faith or living out that faith. Understanding how to classify issues of disagreement is essential for biblical discernment.

Questions:

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17

1. Who was writing and who was the audience?

Paul wrote to Timothy.

2. What does “all Scripture” refer to?

The Bible, the Word of God. “All” indicates every word of Scripture is inspired by God.

3. What do these verses teach about the Bible?

The Bible is literally the Word of God, breathed out by God. It helps us to grow in Christian maturity and to be equipped to do good works that bring honor to God.

4. How do these verses inform the issue of biblical authority?

All Scripture is God-breathed, meaning that every bit of the Bible is inspired. And since God cannot lie or make mistakes, His Word is truth and contains no errors. These verses also teach that the Bible is authoritative (it teaches, corrects, reproves, and trains us) and sufficient (that the man of God may be complete).

Questions:

Read Hebrews 10:10–14

1. How are we sanctified?

Through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.

2. How many times was Jesus sacrificed?

A single time.

3. How effective was Jesus' sacrifice?

Jesus sacrificed himself for all sin for all time. It was entirely effective; there is no need for additional sacrifices.

4. What is the significance of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God?

Jesus is not still on the cross, nor is He still in the tomb, nor does He return to either. He finished what He needed to accomplish to secure salvation for those being sanctified. Having finished His earthly mission, He returned to the right hand of the Father.

Read Romans 14:1–6

1. Who is the author and the audience of this passage?

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome.

2. What disagreement is in view in this passage?

Paul addressed differences in opinion regarding what to eat and whether to celebrate certain days (i.e., holidays).

3. What command does the Bible give regarding holiday celebrations?

The Bible gives no command in this case. The days may be observed or not, as long as each one is acting in accordance with his conscience.

4. Why does Paul allow for disagreement in this area?

This is an area where disagreement is allowed because both observing and abstaining can be done in honor of the Lord.

Questions:

Romans 14:1–6 (continued)

5. How does Paul's treatment of this issue inform our understanding of theological levels of discernment?

This gives us an example of a tertiary issue. The Bible does not give a clear teaching, it does not affect an individual's salvation, and it can be done in honor of the Lord. This disagreement should not cause division.

Summary Questions:

1. How do these levels of theological issues help you to think about discernment?

Encourage discussion, especially among those to whom this is a new idea. These categories can help us to prioritize what issues are essential to the Christian faith and which do not impact our Christian unity.

2. Are there any disagreements you've encountered that were not mentioned? How would you classify the issue? Why?

Discuss answers. Most issues that were unmentioned will likely fall in the secondary or tertiary category, or they are a subset of a primary issue mentioned. Although classifying common issues can be helpful, the purpose of this discussion is to practice thinking about issues in terms of the theological levels.

3. Based on this theological triage, how would you address a difference about the nature of Christ differently than an issue about eschatology or who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Encourage thoughtful discussion, guiding the examples toward practical examples if applicable and appropriate. Recognize that only the primary issue is of salvific importance.

Lesson 9:

Heretic, False Teacher, or Deceived

Introduction:

As humans, we all make mistakes, so there are times when we all get something wrong. So, what makes someone a heretic or a false teacher? All false teaching is false, but not all who teach something false are false teachers. False teachers are those whose teaching is characterized by false teaching. False teaching becomes heresy when it is something that can cause someone to go to hell. All heresy is false teaching, but not all false teaching is heresy. Someone who teaches falsely but repents when confronted is not a false teacher. He was simply ignorant, or perhaps deceived. False teachers and heretics persist in their false teaching even if they are confronted with the truth.

Questions:

Read Acts 18:24–28

1. Who wrote this book and for what purpose?

Hint: The author is not named, but his audience listed in the opening verse connects the book to his Gospel?

Luke wrote Acts to record the events following Jesus' ascension. As he explained to Theophilus in Luke 1:1–4, Luke wished to provide a narrative, an orderly account of the events surrounding Jesus in order that Theophilus, among others, would have certainty in what they had been taught.

2. What genre is the book of Acts?

Historical narrative.

3. In this passage, what error is described in Apollos' teaching?

Apollos had an incorrect view of baptism, having only known about John's baptism.

Questions:

Acts 18:24–28 (continued)

4. How did the more mature believers handle the situation?

Priscilla and Aquila recognized the error of Apollos' teaching, and they approached him privately to offer correction

5. How did Apollos respond? ?

He corrected his teaching and continued to do the work of God.

6. In what way does this passage help us to think about the distinctions between heretics, false teachers, and the ignorant?

Apollos was in error, but he was simply ignorant of the truth. When confronted, he repented and corrected his teaching. Apollos helps us to see that not every error is automatically heresy, nor does it automatically make one a false teacher.

Read Jude 14–16

1. What is Jude warning about in this letter?

The ungodly, false teachers.

2. In verse 15, who is being described?

Looking back to verse 4, Jude is warning against those who have crept into the church but are denying Jesus as Lord and misrepresenting His grace.

3. What adjective is repeated? What does its repetition signify?

The repetition of the adjective “ungodly” serves to emphasize their evil opposition to God. The description is applied to their deeds and their manner, as well as to the individuals themselves.

4. How are these deceivers described?

In addition to ungodly, these men are described as grumblers, pleasure-seekers, arrogant, and swindlers.

Questions:

Jude 14–16 (continued)

5. What is Jude judging these individuals for?

In these verses, Jude does not condemn (or even mention) the content of their message. Rather, he is condemning their behavior and character.

Read 1 John 4:1–6

1. Who wrote this letter?

Hint: Most of the general epistles (the ones not written by Paul) are named after their author.

John.

2. What charge does John give in verse 1? What warning does he give?

John charges believers to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. He warns that there are many false prophets.

3. How can we discern between the spirit of truth and error?

We can recognize the spirit of error because these false teachers will not listen to the messengers of God.

4. What level of false teaching is John describing in these verses?

John is describing heretics, because they deny that Jesus is from God.

Summary Questions:

1. Why is it helpful to differentiate between heretics, false teachers, and the ignorant or deceived?

Differentiating between these can help us to be fair in our assessment, gauge the urgency and severity of our response, assess our motivations, and temper our judgments with grace where appropriate (e.g., Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos).

2. If you had a friend or family member who listens to a heretical teacher, how would you address the issue with them? Would your approach be different if the false teacher was not a heretic?

Discuss ideas. Heresy must be addressed for the spiritual well-being of our loved one. We should have a sense of urgency in snatching them from the fire. Discuss how you might help them to see the teacher's heresy. Discuss if and how your approach might shift if the teacher was not a heretic. The urgency may be reduced, but enlightening our loved one to the error of the teacher remains important. Consider practical steps for helping a loved one recognize false teaching and the need for discernment.

3. Can/should you continue to listen to someone with questionable teachings if your intent is to “eat the meat and spit out the bones”?

Note: This is not the same thing as listening to a false teacher for the purpose of knowing how he's leading others astray.

Guide this discussion with care and caution taking into consideration the spiritual maturity of your participants. Discuss the permissibility and/or wisdom of continuing to listen to someone teaching false or questionable ideas. Consider the type of teacher (Is this a heretic, false teacher, or one who is ignorant?), the intention for listening (What's the benefit? Can you get the same benefit from a safer source?), the frequency and primacy (How often do you listen? Is this a primary source of spiritual nutrition?), and the maturity of the believer (How equipped are you to detect and avoid falsehoods?).

Lesson 10:

Degrees of Separation

Introduction:

Discernment naturally brings with it some difficult decisions. The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot remain in fellowship with those who teach a false gospel. But where exactly is the line when it comes to degrees of separation? While there are some gray areas and places where it is simply a matter of conscience, there are some helpful principles. The Bible stresses unity, which implies that separation is a last resort. We do not wish to separate from someone who will repent when confronted with his error. Nor must we separate from everyone that we have disagreements with. But we must separate from anyone who proclaims, promotes, or endorses heresy.

Questions:

Read John 17:11 & 20–23

1. Who is speaking in these verses?

Jesus.

2. Who is he speaking to?

Jesus is praying to God the Father.

3. What is the context in which he speaks?

This is the night of Jesus' betrayal, after the last supper and before Judas meets Him in the garden at Gethsemane to betray him. This is often called the High Priestly Prayer.

4. For what is he asking?

Jesus asks that all His believers be unified in such a way that it is a testimony of the Gospel.

Questions:

John 17:11 & 20–23 (continued)

5. How does this help us to think about degrees of separation?

Jesus stresses unity in this prayer. Knowing this was the end and He was about to be betrayed and arrested, one of His main concerns was for the unity of His followers. If this was so important to Jesus, we must default to unity and be slow and careful in separating.

Read 1 Timothy 4:11–16

1. Who wrote this book and to whom?

Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him and to equip him in his call to lead the church in Ephesus.

2. What is Timothy to teach?

Timothy is to teach the words of faith and good doctrine (v. 6), the Gospel (v. 10).

3. In what ways is Timothy to be an example?

Timothy was to be an example in his character and behavior (v. 12).

4. In these verses, what is just as important as sound teaching?

It was important for Timothy to preach sound doctrine, but it was equally important that he lived according to the things that he taught, both for his own good and that of his hearers.

Questions:

Read Romans 16:17–18

1. Who is writing this command and to whom?

Paul was writing to believers in Rome.

2. What are Christians to do with those who teach contrary to sound doctrine?

Paul appeals to the Christians he is addressing to avoid these false teachers.

3. How does the default for unity in John 17 balance with the appeal to avoid false teachers here?

Jesus desires the unity of His followers, but Paul clarifies that these false teachers are not serving Christ. They are the ones causing divisions, and they are deceiving the naïve Christians. Thus, separation from them is not disunity among those in Christ, it is simply wise. Also consider 2 John 2:10–11.

Summary Questions:

1. For what reasons should we separate? When is separation not warranted?

Encourage participants to summarize in their own words when separation is called for. We must separate from unrepentant heretics, heterodox churches and movements, those who support or endorse the previous two, and leaders of sound doctrine who have morally disqualifying behavior. Separation should not occur when repentance is present, when differences are secondary issues, or when there is room for clarification regarding one's associations.

2. How would you respond if you heard a preacher you follow say that Jesus gave up his divine nature to come live as a man?

Discuss answers. Jesus did not cease to be divine or give up his divine nature when He took on flesh; Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Thus, this teaching is heresy (though perhaps more subtle than some). If the preacher was otherwise sound, there could be room for asking for clarification—it is possible that he misspoke while teaching about Philippians 1:7 and never intended to mean that Jesus ceased being God. If it wasn't a mistake and there is no evident repentance, then we must separate from this preacher.

3. How would you respond if you found out your favorite preacher was involved with an event where false teachers would also be headlining?

Discuss answers, recognizing that there are some situational considerations as well as conscience/conviction issues to deal with here. This scenario does not require immediate separation, but it would warrant an investigation of the situation. If the preacher did not alter his message but used the opportunity to proclaim truth and expose false teaching, separation is not warranted. If he compromises his message in such a way that it could be construed as endorsing the false teaching, then separation may be in order.

Lesson 11:

Discernment of the Home

Introduction:

Christians are not just called to discern theology; we are called to discern all things. We need to take care to examine how we are behaving and progressing as a Christian ourselves. We must judge our own hearts. There are differences between preferences and sins, and it is important that we distinguish between them and respond appropriately. Fellow Christians in the community of the local church are instrumental in helping us discern ourselves.

Questions:

Read 2 Peter 1:3–11

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Peter wrote to Christians (no specification given).

2. What change is described in verses 3–4?

We have escaped corruption to become partakers of the divine nature.

3. What is the implication of the phrase “make every effort to supplement”?

This phrase implies that there is an intentional and ongoing effort on behalf of the Christian. Spiritual growth takes work.

4. What doctrine is implied by verse 8? What does that mean for the Christian life?

Verse 8 speaks of these qualities increasing, which implies the doctrine of sanctification—the process of growing in holiness. The Christian life should be characterized by spiritual growth as we are being conformed to the image of Christ.

Questions:

2 Peter 1:3–11 (continued)

5. How does verse 9 describe those who lack these qualities?

They are nearsighted/blind and have forgotten (i.e., are not mindful of) their forgiveness.

6. How does this passage apply to self-discernment?

Hint: Consider verses 8 and 10 especially.

These verses suggest that we must be intentional about and mindful of our spiritual growth. Verse 8 suggests we ought to be increasing in godly qualities and verse 10 tells us to be diligent and to practice. Such a concern for our growth (and to ensure we are not like the man in verse 9) requires self-examination and correction.

Read Proverbs 21:2–3

1. Who wrote the book of Proverbs?

Hint: look at Proverbs 1:1.

King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs (Note: chapters 30 and 31 are attributed to other authors).

2. What contrast is drawn in verse 2?

There is a contrast against man and God. Man is often blind to the fault of his own ways, but God sees the truth of the matters.

3. What do these verses suggest about motives?

God is not pleased by outward obedience alone; He wants hearts that obey and honor Him. People can perform right actions without having a correct motive. These verses suggest that God is more concerned with our motivation, our heart, than with our actions.

4. Why is it important to consider our motivations when examining ourselves?

We may be able to convince others of our spirituality, and perhaps even convince ourselves, but we can't hide unrighteous motives from God. We must examine our hearts to check our motives. It is much harder to correct our hearts than to change behaviors, but the inner man is where sanctification happens.

Questions:

Read Galatians 6:1–2

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Paul wrote to the Christian in churches across the region of Galatia (this is not a single city, but a region).

2. How are believers to act toward others who they see in sin?

When Christian sees a brother in sin, he should restore him. This does not mean that he has the ability or responsibility to make the other stop sinning, but he does have the responsibility to point out the sin, call to repentance, and, as necessary and appropriate, help the brother as he fights the temptation.

3. How does belonging to a local congregation benefit believers in the area of self-discernment?

Fellow believers often see our faults and failures where we are blind to them. They can also provide spiritual advice and encouragement. Furthermore, they can provide accountability and support to sustain us in the fight against sin.

4. How can you improve in offering and in receiving accountability?

Discuss answers, looking for specific areas of application as appropriate. It can be hard to accept rebuke and it can be difficult to give (especially in the right spirit). Focus the conversation on practical ideas for individuals.

Summary Questions:

1. How often do you evaluate your own spiritual growth? How has this episode caused you to think about such self-discernment differently?

Encourage honest reflection. It is likely that most participants will not have thought much along the lines of this episode. Discuss how the episode has changed perspectives and encourage ideas for practical application.

2. How have you treated a preference as if it were a sin? How will you adjust your reactions going forward?

Discuss answers, using the conversation to guide participants toward repentance and practical ways to handle situations more appropriately. Discuss the importance of distinguishing between preferences and sins, as well as appropriate responses to each.

3. What is the role of the local church in self-discernment? How can your church accomplish this better? How can you more effectively lean on the body for help in this area?

Allow discussion. The local body is instrumental in helping us discern ourselves because they can see our blind spots. Many churches have room for improvement regarding accountability and spiritual exhortation beyond basic disciplines. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your church. Emphasize that the responsibility also falls on the individual. We must seek accountability, build relationships, be honest and vulnerable, and be humble enough to listen to what our brothers and sisters tell us.

Lesson 12:

When and How Should I Judge My Elder

Introduction:

When dealing with the issue of discernment, the question inevitably arises: “When and how should I judge my pastor or elder?” Our default posture when judging elders or fellow church members is to give them the benefit of the doubt. It is possible, though, even for elders to fall into egregious sin, though any charge against an elder must require two or three witnesses. When this is the case, the Bible gives us a step-by-step process for addressing it privately, with one or two others, and finally before the church congregation.

Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth.

2. What is the subject of these verses?

Love.

3. How does this passage inform our judgments?

Love requires that we are seeking the good of the other. This is how we should interact with our fellow believers. Thus, we will default to patience and belief—giving our brother every benefit of doubt. If there truly is a judgment to be made, this passage informs our attitude and motive in addressing the issue.

Questions:

Read Matthew 18:15–20

1. What genre is Matthew? What does that mean for the purposes of interpretation?

Matthew is a Gospel. It is biographical in nature and should be read as historical narrative. However, it also contains large portions of discourse which may need to be taken figuratively, as analogy, or understood as idiomatic expressions. Context is especially important in interpreting such passages.

2. Who is speaking in this passage and to whom?

Hint: follow the context to the beginning of chapter 18.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

3. What are the four steps described in this process?

First, go to the brother privately. Second, take along another witness or two. Third, tell the church. Fourth, treat him as a Gentile and tax collector (i.e., as if he is not a believer).

4. What is the goal of this process?

The goal of this process is that the brother in error would come to repentance and be restored.

5. Have you ever been a part of the process of church discipline? How have you seen it done well or poorly?

Discuss ways that this process can be done poorly (e.g., out of order, with a gossiping tongue, characterized by harshness rather than love, etc.). Take care that the discussion remains a productive consideration of the process described in the text and does not turn toward gossip, complaint, or criticism.

Questions:

Read 1 Timothy 5:19–20

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Paul wrote to Timothy, instructing him in regard to the conduct of the household of God. Thus, many call this a “pastoral epistle.”

2. What prohibition is given in verse 19?

Do not admit a charge against an elder based on a single witness.

3. What instruction is given regarding those who persist in sin?

If he persists in sin, his sin is to be rebuked in public.

4. Why should the rebuke be made publicly?

So that everyone else may stand in fear. Drawing from this and previous episodes, discuss the impact and necessity of such a public rebuke. A pastor or elder is a public figure in the congregation, so his persistent sin must be rebuked publicly. The public rebuke is a warning to others not to follow the pattern of sin.

5. Why must a charge against an elder require two or three witnesses?

Discuss answers. Elders deserve the benefit of the doubt. They sacrifice daily to serve the body and it is not an easy job. Requiring multiple charges also helps to protect the elder from malicious, bitter, or self-serving individuals who are trying to manipulate a situation or cause harm to the pastor.

Summary Questions:

1. How would you respond if a friend reported to you that they saw your pastor getting drunk at a bar?

Discuss answers. Assuming this is the only such report, you ought not to even entertain the idea. At this stage, it is simply gossip (and could easily be a misunderstanding). No charge should be made. Only after multiple witnesses confirm the charge should it become a matter to be addressed.

2. How would you respond if your pastor said something in a sermon that you disagreed with?

Allow discussion. Consider whether it is merely a disagreement or if it was unbiblical. Further, consider whether it was an issue of primary, secondary, or tertiary importance. If it was unbiblical or if it is a disagreement of significant importance, then you should consider speaking with the pastor about it, not accusing but discussing. It may be that he did not intend to communicate the meaning you inferred.

3. What does it look like to give fellow believers the benefit of the doubt?

Allow discussion, using examples and scenarios as appropriate. We may give the faithful mother the benefit of the doubt when she snaps at her child in the parking lot, but if we begin to see a pattern of sinful behavior, it may be time to confront.

Lesson 13:

Discernment of the Self

Introduction:

It is important for Christians to practice discernment, learning to distinguish between truth and error and, when necessary, judging those who are propagating lies or living in sin. But it is just as important to turn those powers of discernment inward. We must search our own hearts to discern our motives, our failures, our spiritual gifts, and our status with the Lord.

Questions:

Read Psalm 51:1–6

1. Who wrote this psalm and why?

Hint: Some psalms include this type of information at the beginning. Note that this is different than the title headings that are not in the original text but inserted by the translators.

King David wrote this psalm after the prophet Nathan confronted him regarding his sin with Bathsheba.

2. What is the psalmist's attitude toward his sin?

David is grieved by his sin. He recognizes that his sin was an offense against the holy God.

3. What attributes of God does the psalmist recognize?

David acknowledges that God is holy and just (v. 4), and he calls on God's love and mercy (v. 1). He also alludes to God being omniscient (v. 6), sovereign (v. 4), and having the power to save (v. 2).

4. How does this psalm encourage or exhort you in dealing with sin?

Encourage discussion. David gives us an example of how we should grieve over our sin and repent. This psalm reminds us of God's mercy to forgive.

Questions:

Read Acts 2:42

1. What genre is the book of Acts?

Acts is historical narrative.

2. Who is “they” in verse 42?

“They” are the Christians, namely the 3000 souls who were added to the church following Peter’s sermon at Pentecost.

3. What are the fundamental means for Christian growth?

Gospel teaching, Christian fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer.

4. How can these help the Christian who is struggling with assurance or sin?

Encourage discussion. Studying the Word and hearing sound preaching helps us to learn truth. Fellowship with a local body of believers provides accountability, encouragement, and exhortation. The Lord’s Supper is a reminder of the Gospel. Prayer is how we commune with God.

Questions:

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth.

2. What event is being referred to in this passage?

Paul refers to how Moses' face shone after he met with God so that he had to wear a veil because the people were afraid to come near him. If time allows, read the account in Exodus 34:29–35.

3. What does it mean that the veil over our hearts is removed?

Only through Christ, after we are saved, does He remove the veil to allow us to understand His Word and to behold his glory.

4. What is the result of beholding the Lord's glory with unveiled faces? What is this doctrine?

We are being transformed into His image, bit by bit. This is the doctrine of progressive sanctification—the process by which a Christian grows in holiness, or becomes conformed to the image of Christ. The more we look to Christ, the more we grow to be like Him.

Summary Questions:

1. What, if anything, has caused you to doubt your salvation, and how did you resolve the question? How does biblical discernment play a part in assurance of salvation?

Discuss answers. Most, if not all, Christians have struggled with the assurance of their salvation at one time or another. Encourage participants to share what doubts arose and how they came to resolve the issue. Discernment is instrumental because many of our doubts are caused by believing lies or misunderstanding and misapplying Scripture. Discernment leads us to truth, and in truth we find assurance of salvation.

2. What should be the Christian's perspective of guilt, shame, and regret?

Encourage discussion. Ultimately, the Christian should not be weighed down by feelings of guilt and shame; God has declared us righteous, and we are no longer condemned. But there is a sense in which regret and shame can be beneficial in convicting us of sin and leading us to repentance. However, none of these feelings are indicative of our standing with God.

3. Do you know your spiritual gift(s)? How does being part of a local body help you to discern your spiritual gifts?

Encourage discussion. If appropriate for your group, consider identifying gifts in each other, especially for those who are unsure of their own gifts. Discuss practical examples of using those gifts to serve the body. Even if we haven't identified the specifics of our gifts, they are granted for the building up of the body, so the best way to discover them is to serve.

Students Guide

Lesson 1:

The Need for Discernment

Introduction:

It can be difficult to practice discernment well, and many Christians wonder if it is even necessary. While there are unhelpful extremes that should be avoided, biblical discernment applied well is extremely important. God commands us to judge with righteous judgment. Beyond being obedient, discernment is important because false teaching distorts the Gospel, it robs the Christian of spiritual growth, and it entices the unregenerate to false hope and damnation. We must love and defend the truth of God for His glory, for the good of the Church, and for the souls of the lost.

Questions:

Read John 7:24

1. What contrast is drawn in this verse?
2. What command is given?
3. What does it mean to judge with righteous judgment?

Questions:

Read Titus 1:10–14

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: Most letters include this information in the opening verses.

2. What did Paul say must be done with the deceivers?
3. What is the danger that leads to the necessity of this action?
4. What is the hope of rebuke?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:11–13

1. Who wrote this letter, and to whom was it written?

Hint: Most letters include this information in the opening verses.

2. What are the Corinthians instructed to do in verse 11?
3. How do you see discernment in these verses?

Summary Questions:

1. What do you typically think of when you hear the words “discernment” or “judgment”? How did Todd use the terms differently than you are accustomed to?
2. How has this episode caused you to think differently about the dangers of false teaching and the need for discernment?
3. What was most surprising or most impactful about Todd’s discussion of the need for discernment?

Lesson 2:

Judge Not, Lest You Be Judged

Introduction:

Matthew 7:1 is one of the most familiar passages of Scripture, but it is also one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Bible. The Bible does not prohibit judgment; it warns against hypocritical judgment. Throughout the Bible, righteous judgment—or discernment—is encouraged and even commanded. Many Christians argue that judgment is divisive among believers. But discernment doesn't divide—false teaching does. Discernment, righteous judgment, and church discipline are ultimately acts of love, seeking repentance and restoration and protecting the unity of the body of Christ.

Questions:

Read Matthew 7:1–5

1. How have you used (or heard someone use) Matthew 7:1?
2. How does reading the verse in context affect your understanding of this verse or its application?

Questions:

Read Matthew 7:15–20

1. Who is speaking in this passage?
2. In what way does this passage teach that judgment is necessary?
3. What are we supposed to judge?
4. By what means are we to judge?
5. How can a lack of judgment be dangerous?

Read Romans 16:17–18.

1. According to this Scripture, what is it that causes division?
2. How does this inform our perception of discernment?

Summary Questions:

1. How would you respond to the claim that we should not judge?
2. What would be an example of hypocritical judgment? What would be an example of judging with righteous judgment? How can you determine if it is right to judge in a given scenario?
3. What would you do if you were to discover that a brother in Christ was involved in underhanded business practices? How has this study impacted your answer to this question?

Lesson 3:

Naming Names

Introduction:

Evangelical Christians today shy away from calling out false teachers by name. In the zeal to emphasize Christian kindness and gentleness, many have failed to follow the biblical mandate to protect against false teachers. The Bible and church history are rife with examples of false teachers being identified by name for the purpose of calling them to repentance, warning the flock of ravenous wolves, and restoring those who have been led astray. False teaching is a serious issue with eternal consequences. Therefore, naming false teachers is not an unnecessary cruelty, but a biblical act of love toward all believers.

Questions:

1. Read each passage and determine why the author warned against the individual(s) named. How was the warning meant to protect the believers?

2 Timothy 2:17–18

2 Timothy 4:10

2 Timothy 4:14–15

3 John 9–10

Questions:

Read Ephesians 5:11

1. What did Paul instruct the Ephesians to do about works of darkness?
2. Why is it important to expose the works of darkness, considering the context around this verse?

Read 1 Timothy 5:19–20

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom was it written, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider the opening of the letter (1 Timothy 1:1–7)

Who is “those” referring to in 1 Timothy 5:20?

2. How are the elders who persist in sin to be dealt with?
3. What purpose for public rebuke did Paul give?
4. How does this instruction inform the topic of naming false teachers?

Summary Questions:

1. When should we teach/correct privately and when should we name names?
2. How does naming false teachers show love to:
Other believers?

Sound teachers?

False teachers?
3. One objection to naming false teachers is that we would be throwing stones from glass houses. How would you respond to this objection?

Lesson 4:

What is Discernment

Introduction:

Discernment is the ability to distinguish between truth and error or what is right and wrong. This characteristic is emphasized throughout the Bible and every Christian is instructed to practice biblical discernment. Like the Bereans did, we should study the Word of God, receive teaching with an engaged mind, and test what we hear by the Scriptures. False teachers desire blind followers who do not think for themselves; God wants us to be thoughtful and discerning so that we may approve what is excellent.

Questions:

Read 1 Kings 3:5–12

1. Who was speaking, and to whom, in verses 6–9?
2. What was the occasion for this exchange?
Hint: look back to chapter 2 for the full context.
3. What was the king asking for, and for what purpose was he asking for it?
4. What does the Bible indicate about the worthiness of this request?

Questions:

Read Proverbs 2:1–15

1. What is the writer encouraging the reader to seek?
2. How does the use of repetition and synonyms emphasize the point of this passage?
3. By what means does the writer encourage the reader to pursue wisdom (v. 1-4)?
4. Why does the writer think it is important to seek wisdom and discernment (v. 5, 9–15)?

Read Philippians 1:9–11

1. Who is the author and the audience of this passage?
Hint: look at Philippians 1:1
2. What is the relationship between love and knowledge/discernment in these verses?

Questions:

Philippians 1:9–11 (continued)

3. How does abounding in love with discernment benefit in the present?
4. What eternal benefit comes from the application of such discernment?

Summary Questions:

1. Who should be practicing discernment? How can you grow in discernment?
2. How can studying what is true help us discern what is false? Have you ever encountered an idea that may have seemed true or harmless at first but later proved false and dangerous? How can knowledge of false ideas help the Christian be discerning?
3. If you hear a new teacher or an unfamiliar teaching, what steps would you take to determine if you should accept it as true?

Lesson 5:

The Heart of Discernment

Introduction:

While it is important that we correct false teaching, it is equally important that we do not fall into the ditch of extreme severity in how we judge. We must not lose sight of the biblical heart of discernment. Our concern is for the truth of God's Word, but also for the spiritual well-being of those involved. True biblical discernment is driven by a love for God, a love for truth, and a love for people—both the deceived and the deceiver. It's not just about being right; it's about being Christ-like.

Questions:

Read 2 Timothy 2:24–26

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider 2 Timothy 1:1–2

2. What do these verses teach about the role of the Lord's servant?
3. What do these verses teach about the manner of the Lord's servant?
4. What hope does correction bring regarding false teachers?

Questions:

Read Jude 22-23

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider verses 1-3

2. What three groups of people are described in verses 22-23?

3. What is the attitude of the one contending for the faith to be toward those who are wrong?

4. What concern drives the correction in these verses?

Read 1 Timothy 1:3-6

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and for what purpose?

Hint: consider 1 Timothy 1:1-3

2. Why did Paul encourage Timothy to stay at Ephesus?

3. In verse 5, what is “our charge”?

Questions:

1 Timothy 1:3–6 (continued)

4. What did Paul identify as the aim and motivation for this charge?
5. What does it mean for correction to issue from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith?
6. How do verses 6 and 7 help us to understand the consequences of wrongly motivated judgment?

Summary Questions:

1. If I am judging something that is clearly unbiblical, why does my motivation or manner matter?
2. What biblical examples should we follow in making judgments?
3. How does thinking about the people (the false teacher as well as those led astray) help to frame judgment in a more biblical way?

Lesson 6:

Growing in Discernment

Introduction:

Discernment is vital to the Christian life and instrumental in our spiritual growth. Without discernment, we will be like “children, tossed to and fro by the waves” (Ephesians 4:14). We must know what we believe and why we believe it. Biblical discernment directly corresponds with spiritual maturity. Discernment is necessary for growth and is an indicator that growth has occurred. A perpetual lack of discernment may be an indicator of spiritual death.

Questions:

Read Ephesians 4:11–16

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. What role did God give spiritual leaders?
3. What should every believer strive for?
4. How does Paul describe the spiritually immature?
5. What does a lack of discernment imply about a believer?

Questions:

Read Hebrews 5:11–14

1. Who wrote this book and to whom?

Hint: where do we find this information in other New Testament epistles?

2. What admonishment did the writer give in these verses?
3. How does the analogy used here parallel Paul's analogy in Ephesians 4:11–16?
4. What mark is given for the mature Christian in verse 14?
5. What does verse 14 imply about discernment?

Questions:

Read Romans 1:28–31

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?

Hint: Where do we find this information in most epistles?

2. Who are “they” in verse 28?

3. How is your perception of discernment impacted by knowing that a lack of discernment is included in this list of unrighteousness?

Note: the term translated as “without discernment” may be translated in other versions as “foolish”, “without understanding”, “senseless”, etc.

Summary Questions:

1. How has the link between discernment and spiritual maturity changed the way you view the role of discernment in the life of the believer?
2. To what extent have you considered discernment in your evaluation of your own spiritual maturity? Will you reconsider how you view spiritual maturity as a result of today's discussion?
3. What does it mean to constantly practice discernment? How will you train your powers of discernment?

Lesson 7:

Judging Publicly

Introduction:

There are times when false teaching needs to be denounced publicly. But there are rules that guide how to do it well. John Newton offered several poignant considerations in his letter to a fellow pastor. He charged his friend to consider his opponent, his audience, and himself. From Newton's encouragement, we can glean helpful rules to help us speak the truth in love, edifying all involved rather than facilitating harm.

Questions:

Read Galatians 2:11–14

1. Who is “I” in this passage?
2. What was Cephas (a.k.a., Peter) doing that required opposition?
3. Who witnessed this correction?

Questions:

Galatians 2:11–14 (continued)

4. Why did Peter's actions require public opposition?

Read Ephesians 4:11–16

1. What does the transition word at the beginning of verse 15 tell us?
2. What is the relationship between truth and love?
3. What does the rest of the sentence suggest about the reason for and result of teaching the truth?

Questions:

Read Jude 17–23

1. How are the scoffers described?
2. What imperative are we given? How are we to be different?
3. How are both “speaking truth” and “love” present in this charge to believers?
4. Which of the rules for public rebuke do you find most instructive? Most challenging?
5. How might you go about applying these rules next time you see a false idea or teaching that needs to be corrected?
6. Though these rules were recommended for public rebuke, how could they benefit private disagreements?

Lesson 8:

Theological Levels of Discernment

Introduction:

There is nothing more important than studying theology, but not all points of Christian theology are of equal importance and have equal ramifications. The discerning Christian must be able to categorize issues of error and disagreement into three levels. Issues of primary importance are those essential to Christian orthodoxy. Secondary issues are important, but genuine believers may land on different sides of the question. Issues of tertiary (i.e., third) importance are areas that are fun to debate but have little impact on our faith or living out that faith. Understanding how to classify issues of disagreement is essential for biblical discernment.

Questions:

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17

1. Who was writing and who was the audience?
2. What does “all Scripture” refer to?
3. What do these verses teach about the Bible?
4. How do these verses inform the issue of biblical authority?

Questions:

Read Hebrews 10:10–14

1. How are we sanctified?
2. How many times was Jesus sacrificed?
3. How effective was Jesus' sacrifice?
4. What is the significance of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God?

Read Romans 14:1–6

1. Who is the author and the audience of this passage?
2. What disagreement is in view in this passage?
3. What command does the Bible give regarding holiday celebrations?
4. Why does Paul allow for disagreement in this area?

Questions:

Romans 14:1–6 (continued)

5. How does Paul's treatment of this issue inform our understanding of theological levels of discernment?

Summary Questions:

1. How do these levels of theological issues help you to think about discernment?
2. Are there any disagreements you've encountered that were not mentioned? How would you classify the issue? Why?
3. Based on this theological triage, how would you address a difference about the nature of Christ differently than an issue about eschatology or who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Lesson 9:

Heretic, False Teacher, or Deceived

Introduction:

As humans, we all make mistakes, so there are times when we all get something wrong. So, what makes someone a heretic or a false teacher? All false teaching is false, but not all who teach something false are false teachers. False teachers are those whose teaching is characterized by false teaching. False teaching becomes heresy when it is something that can cause someone to go to hell. All heresy is false teaching, but not all false teaching is heresy. Someone who teaches falsely but repents when confronted is not a false teacher. He was simply ignorant, or perhaps deceived. False teachers and heretics persist in their false teaching even if they are confronted with the truth.

Questions:

Read Acts 18:24–28

1. Who wrote this book and for what purpose?

Hint: The author is not named, but his audience listed in the opening verse connects the book to his Gospel?

2. What genre is the book of Acts?

3. In this passage, what error is described in Apollos' teaching?

Questions:

Acts 18:24–28 (continued)

4. How did the more mature believers handle the situation?
5. How did Apollos respond? ?
6. In what way does this passage help us to think about the distinctions between heretics, false teachers, and the ignorant?

Read Jude 14–16

1. What is Jude warning about in this letter?
2. In verse 15, who is being described?
3. What adjective is repeated? What does its repetition signify?
4. How are these deceivers described?

Questions:

Jude 14–16 (continued)

5. What is Jude judging these individuals for?

Read 1 John 4:1–6

1. Who wrote this letter?

Hint: Most of the general epistles (the ones not written by Paul) are named after their author.

2. What charge does John give in verse 1? What warning does he give?

3. How can we discern between the spirit of truth and error?

4. What level of false teaching is John describing in these verses?

Summary Questions:

1. Why is it helpful to differentiate between heretics, false teachers, and the ignorant or deceived?
2. If you had a friend or family member who listens to a heretical teacher, how would you address the issue with them? Would your approach be different if the false teacher was not a heretic?
3. Can/should you continue to listen to someone with questionable teachings if your intent is to “eat the meat and spit out the bones”?

Note: This is not the same thing as listening to a false teacher for the purpose of knowing how he’s leading others astray.

Lesson 10:

Degrees of Separation

Introduction:

Discernment naturally brings with it some difficult decisions. The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot remain in fellowship with those who teach a false gospel. But where exactly is the line when it comes to degrees of separation? While there are some gray areas and places where it is simply a matter of conscience, there are some helpful principles. The Bible stresses unity, which implies that separation is a last resort. We do not wish to separate from someone who will repent when confronted with his error. Nor must we separate from everyone that we have disagreements with. But we must separate from anyone who proclaims, promotes, or endorses heresy.

Questions:

Read John 17:11 & 20–23

1. Who is speaking in these verses?
2. Who is he speaking to?
3. What is the context in which he speaks?
4. For what is he asking?

Questions:

John 17:11 & 20–23 (continued)

5. How does this help us to think about degrees of separation?

Read 1 Timothy 4:11–16

1. Who wrote this book and to whom?
2. What is Timothy to teach?
3. In what ways is Timothy to be an example?
4. In these verses, what is just as important as sound teaching?

Questions:

Read Romans 16:17–18

1. Who is writing this command and to whom?
2. What are Christians to do with those who teach contrary to sound doctrine?
3. How does the default for unity in John 17 balance with the appeal to avoid false teachers here?

Summary Questions:

1. For what reasons should we separate? When is separation not warranted?
2. How would you respond if you heard a preacher you follow say that Jesus gave up his divine nature to come live as a man?
3. How would you respond if you found out your favorite preacher was involved with an event where false teachers would also be headlining?

Lesson 11:

Discernment of the Home

Introduction:

Christians are not just called to discern theology; we are called to discern all things. We need to take care to examine how we are behaving and progressing as a Christian ourselves. We must judge our own hearts. There are differences between preferences and sins, and it is important that we distinguish between them and respond appropriately. Fellow Christians in the community of the local church are instrumental in helping us discern ourselves.

Questions:

Read 2 Peter 1:3–11

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. What change is described in verses 3–4?
3. What is the implication of the phrase “make every effort to supplement”?
4. What doctrine is implied by verse 8? What does that mean for the Christian life?

Questions:

2 Peter 1:3–11 (continued)

5. How does verse 9 describe those who lack these qualities?
6. How does this passage apply to self-discernment?
Hint: Consider verses 8 and 10 especially.

Read Proverbs 21:2–3

1. Who wrote the book of Proverbs?
Hint: look at Proverbs 1:1.
2. What contrast is drawn in verse 2?
3. What do these verses suggest about motives?
4. Why is it important to consider our motivations when examining ourselves?

Questions:

Read Galatians 6:1–2

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. How are believers to act toward others who they see in sin?
3. How does belonging to a local congregation benefit believers in the area of self-discernment?
4. How can you improve in offering and in receiving accountability?

Summary Questions:

1. How often do you evaluate your own spiritual growth? How has this episode caused you to think about such self-discernment differently?
2. How have you treated a preference as if it were a sin? How will you adjust your reactions going forward?
3. What is the role of the local church in self-discernment? How can your church accomplish this better? How can you more effectively lean on the body for help in this area?

Lesson 12:

When and How Should I Judge My Elder

Introduction:

When dealing with the issue of discernment, the question inevitably arises: “When and how should I judge my pastor or elder?” Our default posture when judging elders or fellow church members is to give them the benefit of the doubt. It is possible, though, even for elders to fall into egregious sin, though any charge against an elder must require two or three witnesses. When this is the case, the Bible gives us a step-by-step process for addressing it privately, with one or two others, and finally before the church congregation.

Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. What is the subject of these verses?
3. How does this passage inform our judgments?

Questions:

Read Matthew 18:15–20

1. What genre is Matthew? What does that mean for the purposes of interpretation?
2. Who is speaking in this passage and to whom?
Hint: follow the context to the beginning of chapter 18.
3. What are the four steps described in this process?
4. What is the goal of this process?
5. Have you ever been a part of the process of church discipline? How have you seen it done well or poorly?

Questions:

Read 1 Timothy 5:19–20

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. What prohibition is given in verse 19?
3. What instruction is given regarding those who persist in sin?
4. Why should the rebuke be made publicly?
5. Why must a charge against an elder require two or three witnesses?

Summary Questions:

1. How would you respond if a friend reported to you that they saw your pastor getting drunk at a bar?
2. How would you respond if you pastor said something in a sermon that you disagreed with?
3. What does it look like to give fellow believers the benefit of the doubt?

Lesson 13:

Discernment of the Self

Introduction:

It is important for Christians to practice discernment, learning to distinguish between truth and error and, when necessary, judging those who are propagating lies or living in sin. But it is just as important to turn those powers of discernment inward. We must search our own hearts to discern our motives, our failures, our spiritual gifts, and our status with the Lord.

Questions:

Read Psalm 51:1–6

1. Who wrote this psalm and why?

Hint: Some psalms include this type of information at the beginning. Note that this is different than the title headings that are not in the original text but inserted by the translators.

2. What is the psalmist's attitude toward his sin?
3. What attributes of God does the psalmist recognize?
4. How does this psalm encourage or exhort you in dealing with sin?

Questions:

Read Acts 2:42

1. What genre is the book of Acts?
2. Who is “they” in verse 42?
3. What are the fundamental means for Christian growth?
4. How can these help the Christian who is struggling with assurance or sin?

Questions:

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

1. Who wrote this letter and to whom?
2. What event is being referred to in this passage?
3. What does it mean that the veil over our hearts is removed?
4. What is the result of beholding the Lord's glory with unveiled faces? What is this doctrine?

Summary Questions:

1. What, if anything, has caused you to doubt your salvation, and how did you resolve the question? How does biblical discernment play a part in assurance of salvation?
2. What should be the Christian's perspective of guilt, shame, and regret?
3. Do you know your spiritual gift(s)? How does being part of a local body help you to discern your spiritual gifts?