

Discerning New Evangelicalism

Lesson Ten

The Importance of Discernment

“¹³ Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken *so much* against thee? ¹⁴ Ye have said, It *is* vain to serve God: and what profit *is it* that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, *they that* tempt God are even delivered. ¹⁶ Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. ¹⁷ And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. ¹⁸ Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Malachi 3:13-18).

“¹⁰ Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. ¹¹ Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. ¹² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³ For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:10-14).

Someone once told me that New Evangelicalism was an old problem and that it does not threaten the fundamental church today. That individual has a serious problem with discernment. The fact of the matter is that almost every new “born again” Christian begins his Christian life as a New Evangelical. That is because he has little or no doctrinal definitiveness about his beliefs. In fact, if he has been saved out of liturgical Christianity (sacramentalism and sacerdotalism), the vast majority of things he believes will have to be corrected and eradicated with sound Bible teaching.

Discernment is a great need among Bible believing Christians. In Malachi 3:18 the word “discern” is translated from the Hebrew word *ra'ah* (raw-aw'). This word means to look at something; to inspect it. The context of Malachi 3:18 implies that during the Millennial Kingdom reign of Christ, believers will be able to distinguish “between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” This seems a remarkable statement, because it seems to me that this reality ought to be obvious to anyone that has a basic knowledge of the Word of God.

We only need to look at our own Christianity to know the difficulty that Christians face when it comes to discernment “between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” The theological smorgasbord that is presented on Christian radio, religious television and in the Christian Book Store is a good representation of need for spiritual discernment and the difficulties of discernment facing the average Christian.

Many Christians are not definitive enough in their theology to be able to understand the subtle heresies that are being taught. Therefore they are being led astray from the center of God’s will. There are many popular preachers and Christian writers that most Christians are familiar with. Most Christians recognize the names of Charles Swindoll, Charles Ryrie, Chuck Colson, J.I. Packer, Howard Hendricks, Billy Graham, John MacArthur, James Dobson, R.C. Sproul and Bill Hybels (to name a few). Yet few Christians have sought out who these men are and what their belief systems are.

I do not mean to be unkind, but each of these men hold to serious theological heresies that have influenced thousands of Christians away from the center of God’s will. I believe most of these men are saved men, but I also believe they are very dangerous men. Every one of them is to some degree a New Evangelical.

The undiscerning Christian does not make any theological evaluation of an author, speaker or Christian counselor before he/she gives that individual his/her ear. Discernment evaluates the overall theological position of a person before considering the details of that person's teaching. The undiscerning Christian does not make any theological evaluation of an author, speaker or Christian counselor before he/she gives that individual his/her ear. What a person does speaks louder than his words. Look at his affiliations. If a person associates with theological liberals, that person is not a Biblical separatist. If a person is tolerant of heretical theological positions, that person is a New Evangelical and has opened his mind to his own theological corruption. He will then seek to persuade others to that same open-mindedness.

Someone has said "charity begins at home." We might add that *discernment begins at home*. Sadly, many independent, fundamental Baptist Churches are filled with people and members who are New Evangelicals. Many of those people do not even know that they are New Evangelicals.

1. If you think it is not important what church you attend as long as you are faithful, read your Bible, pray and serve the Lord, you are probably a New Evangelical.
2. If you think fundamentalists are unloving because they are unwilling to be more tolerant of differences in theological views, you are probably a New Evangelical.
3. If you would be willing to welcome performance/entertainment based music into the church, you are probably a New Evangelical.
4. If you are willing to put family recreation or other such things above attending Church services, you are probably a New Evangelical.
5. If you allow yourself or your children to watch things on T.V. or on Videos (cussing, sexual innuendoes or immorality, promotion of evolution, etc.) that contradict God's Word, you are probably a New Evangelical.
6. If you believe in the Rodney King philosophy of Christianity ("Can't we . . . can't we all just get along?"), you are probably a New Evangelical.
7. If you think anyone that believes in Jesus is saved, regardless if they also believe in the necessity of participation in a sacrament or the need to do *good works*, you are probably a New Evangelical.

It would be impossible to constantly warn believers about every New Evangelical that comes on the scene of human history. The best way to prepare Christians to be able to discern New Evangelicals is by thoroughly teaching them truth so that they will easily be able to distinguish false doctrine when it is taught. That is what Hebrews 5:14 is saying. Discerners need to be theological "meat eaters."

The term New Evangelical was coined by a man by the name of Dr. Harold Ockenga at the 1948 Convocation Address at Fuller Theological Seminary. The main tenet of New Evangelicalism was to lay aside the basic theological differences with Liberalism and look for areas of agreement and cooperation. Instead of separating from Liberalism and confronting them with the heresies they taught, New Evangelicalism sought to infiltrate the ranks of Liberalism and liberal churches to evangelize them from within.

Therefore two of the biggest "Red Flags" to recognizing New Evangelicals is their willingness to cooperate with Liberals rather than separate from them. This is done in direct disobedience to the Word of God.

¹⁷ Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. ¹⁸ For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18).

⁷ For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. ⁹ Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹ For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 7-11).

“³ Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. ⁴ For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3-4).

“¹⁴ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ¹⁶ And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹⁷ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, ¹⁸ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (II Corinthians 6:14-18).

Infiltration and cooperation will be evident practices of New Evangelicals and New Evangelical churches. Although this is certainly an evident reality of New Evangelicals, we need to look deeper in their belief system to understand how they can give themselves permission to do this when the Scriptures clearly teach just the opposite.

Central to the reason New Evangelicals give themselves permission to disobey Scripture or disregard certain Scriptural directives is due to their approach to the Word of God itself. When Liberalism and Higher Criticism began to challenge the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, many Evangelicals began to do the same things (we always fall in the direction we lean). Although they did not make the sweeping condemnation of the Scriptures that the Liberals did, they did reopen the subject of Biblical inspiration to reinvestigation. From that reinvestigation came a number of different beliefs regarding inspiration that are held to by many New Evangelicals today. A few of those very faulty, heretical positions on inspiration are as follows:

Natural Inspiration: the men who wrote the Bible were great geniuses who did not require any supernatural help.

Dynamic or Mystical Inspiration: the writers were not only geniuses, but were also Spirit filled and guided.

Degree Inspiration: within the inspired Bible some parts are more inspired than others.

Partial Inspiration: some parts of the Bible are inspired, others are not. The contemporary expression of this view teaches that the Bible is inspired in its purpose.

Concept Inspiration: the ideas or concepts of the Bible are inspired, but not the words. This is the view generally held by Neo-Orthodoxy.

Barthian Inspiration: the center of revelation is Jesus Christ, the Bible stands on the periphery of that circle. Jesus Christ is the Word. Therefore, the most important parts (the majors) are those which witness about Jesus Christ. Barthians also embrace the conclusions of liberalism regarding the Gospels, which teach that there are errors in their records. Major and minor doctrines are the basic premise of Neo-Evangelicalism.

Karl Barth's position on inspiration is probably the most widely accepted and most influential position on inspiration held by New Evangelicals (although Barth himself was an Existentialist who denied Biblical absolutes proclaiming all truth to be subjective). **A “Red Flag” to this belief is when you hear someone categorize the Scriptures into major and minor doctrines.** This allows for liberty to choose the doctrines they believe to be important to determine their methodology in the administration of the Church and their evangelistic efforts. According to this belief system, getting people saved is the most important mission of the Church. Therefore, separation is a minor issue compared to the major issue of evangelism.

Another “Red Flag” to New Evangelicalism is their continued abandonment of the King James Version of the Bible for the newer, “easier to read” versions. Although some men, who are fundamentalist, do use some of these newer versions of the Bible, this is usually indicator of a movement toward New Evangelicalism. Two of the versions regularly promoted by New Evangelicals are The NAS and the NIV. These Bibles are translated from what is known as the Eclectic Text (NA26/UBS3). The New King James version is also being widely promoted today. The reason behind these new translations is not about translation at all. It is about accepting a Greek Text *reconstructed* by liberals and unbelievers.

Another fountainhead for the birth and growth of New Evangelism is the willingness to accept a very broad position regarding the various doctrines of salvation (soteriological inclusivism). This broad salvation position considers many individuals to be genuine believers while continuing to believe many false doctrines that deny the finished work of Christ. These include baptismal regeneration (most major denominations), transubstantiation (Roman Catholics), consubstantiation (Lutherans, Episcopalians and most other major denominations), and the need to live a certain way to keep from losing your salvation (Pentecostals, many Evangelical Free, and Charismatics as well as most major denominations).

“¹ Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ² Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Timothy 4:1-2).

Rationalism has replaced literalism in the mind of the New Evangelical. This is the *Chameleon* aspect of New Evangelicalism. The New Evangelical tends to rationalize the Word of God. For him the question is not, what has God said? The question is, what did God mean to say as it relates to the culture I live in?” This is communicated by the phrase, “We need to make the Bible culturally relevant.” Before anyone can escape the Satanic deception (“doctrines of devils”), he must first escape from this rationalism and return to literalism.

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The Importance of Discernment

1. Discuss the meaning of the word “discern” as used in Malachi 3:18? _____

2. Why do you think discernment is such a critical need among Christians today? _____

3. According to Hebrews 5:10-14, why is it necessary for discerners to be theological “meat eaters”? _____

4. Who is the man credited with being the father of New Evangelicalism? _____
5. Define New Evangelicalism. _____

6. From the definition of New Evangelicalism, list and discuss two of the biggest *Red Flags* to discerning New Evangelicals.
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
7. List some Scripture texts that show these practices are in direct disobedience to God’s Word. _____

8. How is it that New Evangelicals are able to circumvent these direct commands of Scripture to do what they do? _____
9. Define the following heretical theological positions on the inspiration of Scripture.
 - A. Natural Inspiration:** _____

 - B. Dynamic or Mystical Inspiration:** _____

 - C. Degree Inspiration:** _____

 - D. Partial Inspiration:** _____

 - E. Concept Inspiration:** _____

 - F. Barthian Inspiration:** _____

10. How does the Bible version issue reveal New Evangelicals? _____

11. Discuss why New Evangelicals are so willing to accept individuals from a very wide variety of beliefs about salvation as genuine believers. _____

