

Discernment/Discrimination

1. Are you sometimes frightened to open your mouth in case someone listening is going to accuse you of being something-*ist*?
2. Society is extremely touchy about anything that might be taken as discrimination - since it assumes (quite wrongly!) that discrimination equals discrimination *against*.
3. Discrimination is a necessary part of living and surviving. It means simply to *recognise a distinction*. Tennyson's grandchildren were amazed when their grandfather picked a load of toadstools and promptly ate the lot! The poet's ability to distinguish between edible and poisonous fungi was greater than his family's!
4. Every time we make a choice - it is based on our having made a distinction. If we favour B more than A we will opt for B. Whether we're selecting our life-long partner, our car or our breakfast cereal each requires a choice and each choice will require us to discriminate.
5. I discriminate between the beliefs of Jews and of Christians. The two sets of beliefs about Jesus are contradictory, so I have to discriminate between the two. I have to opt for one or the other: either Jesus was *not* God's Messiah, or Jesus *was* God's Messiah. Such a necessary discrimination is how I can think truly about Jews and Christians. Discrimination is about truth.
6. It does not mean that I discriminate *against* Jews because truth forces me to discriminate between their beliefs and mine. It is not anti-Jewish to do this - but pro-Jewish! It is treating a person well to understand and appreciate differences. Reconciliation and respect between A and B is much more real when the differences between A and B are faced, than when cloudy thinking so covers A and B that they appear the same!
7. Modern society knows that differences can be difficult to live with, and so tries to act and police our speaking to imply that differences don't exist! This papers over cracks, not mends them. It often does not want to *recognise the distinction* between male and female, between truth and falsehood, between liberty and licence, between freedom and responsibility, and - worst of all - between good and evil.
8. Discrimination is not a nasty thing. It is essential for living and it has a high priority in Scripture and in Christian living. In the New Testament the word is often translated *discernment*, and in Corinthians 12:10 St. Paul lists the *discernment of spirits* as among the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes for the common good. Translators use others words like *distinguish* and *know the difference between*. J.B.Phillips has *the ability to discriminate in spiritual matters*. William Tyndale, translating the New Testament into English for the first time way back in 1534, used *judgement*. This no doubt influenced the wording of that wonderful Pentecost Prayer which prays for a right discrimination:

Almighty God, who as at this time
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a **right judgement** in all things,
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort...

9. What a gift to the church, and through the church to the world, would be that of having a 'right judgement', i.e. the ability rightly to discriminate things in the mish-mash and confusion of modern life.