

DISCERNING BOTH GOOD AND EVIL

Gary McDade

Mature Christians are described by the writer of Hebrews as "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). This exercise involves putting those who teach to the test. The apostle John wrote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I Jn. 4:1). Spiritual growth in grace and knowledge is an integral element of the apostles' doctrine (II Pet. 3:18, Acts 2:42).

From time to time across the years innovations are introduced among brethren that represent a departure from the truth and must be met and exposed. On this point, Luke wrote, "Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!" (Lk. 17:1). In ferreting out the truth it is challenging to correctly determine who is in the right and who is in the wrong when these situations arise. One of the most helpful observations along this line came in an article written in *The Spiritual Sword* by William Woodson back in October of 1970. Woodson was writing on the subject "Instrumental Music in the Worship of God." Within the article he discussed how a negative defense is not logically necessary. The information in this article provides profound assistance in "discerning both good and evil." Woodson wrote:

"It is not logically the responsibility of the negative position of a disputed question to prove the point in dispute is wrong, not authorized, out of harmony with revealed truth, etc. Instead, it is the responsibility of the advocate, the user, the participant to show his position or practice is in harmony with the principles of God. The difference between these two courses of approach or strategy becomes more and more important as one proceeds.

"There is a subtle attempt by many people to argue in this fashion: Here is my practice, I like it, I have been doing it, others have been doing it. Now you have opposed it. Unless you can prove it is wrong, it is obvious that my practice is correct.

"Such a strategy is often presented, but upon reflection it is seen to beg the question in dispute. It is the responsibility of the advocate of a position, the supporter of a cause, to show the ground of his action, the reason for his practice, when the matter is called into dispute. Unless such an adequate defense is made of

the position or practice, it is—logically—the case that the matter in dispute is unauthorized, not permitted, without justification, until such adequate support is given.

"Because of this fact, universally recognized, instrumental music advocates have found themselves in frequent difficulties as they attempt to provide such adequate support. The fact is that—with few exceptions—most defenders of instrumental music take it for granted that the use of the instrument is right, and without further ado, seek to require of opponents of the use in worship a justification of their opposition. . . . "

"Unless one's opposition to a practice rests on taste or whim, there must be some principle which underlies the opposition. This is the case with the opposition to the instrument: A principle obtains concerning the service of God and shows the use is not in harmony with his will.

"The principle may be stated as follows: When God tells man to do a certain thing *and* tells him *how* to do it, man is required by obedience to God to do that thing and to do it in the *way* God has directed.

"Upon reflection it is obvious one could err from this principle in two ways. One would err should he refuse to do what God has told man to do. Also, one would err should he do what God had told man, but in a way different from the way in which God has indicated it should be done. Either course of action would be counter to the teaching of God and thus wrong. . . . "

"The principle is obviously true and accepted by those who profess to honor the name of God and his Son. To repudiate the principle would be to open the floodgates to every device of man, each would become a law unto himself, and the authority of God would be delivered a death blow. It needs no further laboring to see that when God tells man what to do *and* how to do it, man is obligated in respect of God's authority to do what God said and *in the way* God said it" (pp. 31-36).

The ones who introduced the instrument of music into the worship of God have the logical responsibility to show its practice to be authorized by the word of God. Again, "it is not logically the responsibility of the negative position of a disputed question to prove the point in dispute is wrong, not authorized, out of harmony with revealed truth, etc."

An application of this helpful teaching to two areas of concern that recently have arisen could restore harmony within the body of Christ relative to these matters just as it could in connection with the dispute over the use of instrumental music. First, those who are teaching that the Holy Spirit today operates directly on the heart of a Christian yet never separate and apart from the word of God are challenging those who deny it to disprove their position. Surely, it must be exasperating for them to have their challenges to certain individuals go unaccepted, but were they to fulfill their logical responsibility and prove their position to be in harmony with the word of God, all strife would cease. Why? Because by proving their position from the Bible it would serve to show that the Bible is all-sufficient and that through the medium of the teaching of the Bible the Holy Spirit exerts his influence upon the heart and mind of man. Second, those who are founding Community Churches in Memphis and all across the country are advocating a name, organization, worship, and mission which departs from New Testament teaching. When brought into dispute, they insist that those who object should show wherein they are wrong. It is true in connection with this innovation just as it is in regard to the first that such efforts have been made. Still, Community Church advocates wish to see their dissenters explain such things as what a praise team is and how they are employed in worship showing wherein their use is wrong. Or, they present some concocted name such as "Covenant Fellowship Community Church" and desire to have efforts made to show the unscriptural nature of the use of such a name. Community Churches would be forever gone from even being "loosely affiliated with churches of Christ," as one founder phrased it, were it the case that members of the church of Christ demand them to shoulder their logical responsibility and prove their positions and practices to be in harmony with the word of God.

Unity and harmony within the body of Christ is dependent upon each Christian's willingness to lovingly and honestly cultivate the ability to be "discerning both good and evil." Imagine what wonderful strides for good could be made if the principles set forth here were brought to bear on the use of instrumental music in the worship, the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and the Community Church. Even should these issues remain, the enhanced ability to be "discerning both good and evil" would help single out the factious from the faithful.