



DISCERNING GOOD AND EVIL

by

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“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”

—I Kings 3:9

In recent years we have read and heard a good bit about the fact that we are involved in a “culture war” in this country. Having examined that issue in some depth for many years, I certainly would have to agree with the commentators who put it that way. It is a war for the minds and souls and lives of every American, and it has been going on apace and growing in intensity. It is ultimately a battle of faith against unbelief. You may hear it described in many other ways, but I want you to remember that this is ultimately a battle *for* God or *against* Him.

Goethe, the great German writer, has said that the only struggle [in this world] worth our attention and our effort is the struggle between faith and unbelief. We are living through just such a period in our country today. Mortimer Adler, who edited the *Great Books of the Western World*, said that faith in God has more consequences for life action than any other factor. So this is a pervasive, all-inclusive war we are engaged in.

The first phase of any war, as a general will tell you, is the semantical phase, and that is where we have been for the last century. It is a war of words—a conflict that defines what the war is all about. The twentieth century, in almost its entirety, saw the unfolding and development of this semantical war—and I must tell you that we are very definitely losing. We have been out-generated, out-strategized, and out-maneuvered on every side, and we are losing that war.

But . . . things are changing, and I hope they will continue to change even more. I am somewhat reminded of George Orwell's famous classic, *1984*. In it he talks about a tyrannical government where Big Brother was watching you and there were various departments like we never heard of before. One of them was the Department of Truth. If you were to call the Department of Truth, you would find people working twenty-four hours a day transforming truth into lies. Well, we have just such a department today in this country. Now I can't take you to a building in Washington, D.C., where it is housed, but I assure you that it does exist. Today I hope to show you a little bit of the handiwork so you can judge for yourself.

I would like to share with you three of the most strategic words in this semantic battle and the consequences of the changes and distortions in those words. Don't ever forget that the war starts with words. For example, in 1857 the Supreme Court of the United States passed what is known as the *Dred Scott Decision*. In that decision they used a word: "blacks." They said, "they are not . . . persons."

This gave carte blanche to slavery in America. Being "not persons," they were considered merely chattel or property. An owner could do with them whatever he wished, including killing them, because they were not persons. Does that word make any difference?

Or consider Nazi Germany. The Nazi Supreme Court passed a decision in which they said that Jews were not "persons." The final outcome of that could be discovered at Auschwitz, but it began semantically, and that led to *Kristallnacht* ["night of broken glass" where nearly 200 synagogues were destroyed] and the beginning of the actual persecution. But it all was virtually settled with words.

Or for that matter, you could come into America in the twentieth century, when the Supreme Court of the United States passed *Roe v. Wade*. (By the way, *Roe* now repudiates abortion, as does *Doe* in the *Roe* and *Doe* decisions. Both these women now repudiate abortion.) In that decision the Court said that babies in the womb were not "persons." Not persons. Not persons. Not persons. And almost 40 million babies have died since then in America. The semantical war can sometimes determine ghastly consequences and outcomes.

THREE CRITICAL TERMS

I want to talk to you today about three of the most crucial, critical terms being used that have been perverted, transformed, and changed into something altogether other than what they really are. These three words are used to deceive the American people and to forward the attack against God, Christ, and Christianity in this country. I hope you will remember them.

RELATIVITY

The first one is *relativity*. That is a familiar word to us all. Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago wrote a blockbuster book a decade and a half ago entitled *The Closing of the American Mind*. In the first sentence of the very first part of that book, he says:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can

count on the student's reaction: [If someone should suggest that this is not actually true] they [the students] will be uncomprehending.

You might as well tell them that $2 + 2$ is 7. They cannot believe that anyone believes that all truth is not relative. They certainly know there are no absolutes. This, says Professor Bloom, is the one thing that twelve years in public schools have taught tens of millions of American students.

Should you ask one of these freshmen in college how he knows that, he will probably tell you, "Hey man, where have you been? Haven't you ever heard of Einstein's theory of relativity? He proved that everything is relative. How stupid can you be?"

Well, now, did he or didn't he? When Einstein discovered that the theory of relativity had been spread out from the science of physics and was being used in the realm of morals and ethics and everything else, he was appalled! This is what Einstein said: "Relativity is for physics, not ethics."

Albert Einstein *did not believe* that everything was relative, but that term has been smushed and smeared until it covers every aspect of human life. The students believe the big lie that everything is relative, there are no absolutes, and there is no moral truth that is absolutely true. The idea that there is no truth of any kind that is absolutely true has led to all kinds of other evils as well. This moves us to the second point I would like to discuss with you to show you where that supposition has gone.

TOLERANCE

The second critical term is the word *tolerance*. Now all of us know that tolerance means to put up with or bear with people who hold views or beliefs or values or lifestyles that you don't agree with. If you are a Christian, or for that matter even a gentleman or a lady, you will bear with them graciously and kindly. Even though you disagree with them, you will try to be tolerant and kind to them. This is what tolerance means.

But not any more. The word tolerance has gone through the "Department of Truth." It has been crushed and smushed and spread out until it means something entirely different. Suppose a father and a teenage son are discussing almost any moral subject today, and the subject of tolerance comes up. This will very frequently lead into a heated argument. The reason is that they are not talking about the same thing at all. The father is talking about tolerance as it has been known for centuries. The son is talking about the "new tolerance." (By the way, Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler describe this in their excellent book, *The New Tolerance*, which I recommend to all of you.)

What is the *new tolerance*? The new tolerance is the idea that we are not only to put up with and bear with others who have differing views and values and habits and lifestyles and beliefs than our own, but we are to accept those beliefs, those values, and those lifestyles as absolutely equal to and just as valid as our own. That is the new tolerance, and it is being pounded into the minds and hearts of scores of millions of students, even this very week. The new tolerance—you have to accept all of their values, all of their beliefs.

Therefore, you don't have any religious beliefs that are any better than anyone else's, since after all, everything is relative. Since your beliefs are not any better than theirs, and since your moral views are not superior to their moral views, no matter if they are little more than alley cats in their sexual lives, you cannot, indeed, impose your views upon them. You must accept not only them, but you must graciously and kindly accept their lifestyles, their beliefs, and their habits as absolutely equal to your own. If you don't, you are called an intolerant bigot, and kids by the millions have been called that in front of their classmates in the classrooms of this country. Most of them, indeed, quake before such an assault.

Any person who gives up a belief in the moral absolutes and the absolute truth of the faith that he or she has been taught will be incapable of distinguishing right from wrong and will, as McDowell says, be powerless to resist temptation and choose the right. This is what is happening to millions of students in our schools today because of the new tolerance. Not only do you put up with the persons graciously and kindly, but you must accept all of their views, their beliefs, their values, and their lifestyles as equal as your own.

If you don't, my friend, there are serious consequences waiting for you, because they have progressed even beyond what I've said. Today they not only want your glad acceptance of all of their views, lifestyles, beliefs, values, and habits as equal with your own, but they want you to participate in what they do. You must approve and participate. For example:

- Stanford University's Gay and Lesbian Alliance promotes a Shorts Day each spring, during which students are exhorted to wear shorts to signal their support for the homosexual agenda. It just so happens that most of the students wear shorts almost every day, so they are put in a position of either having to change their dress or appear to support what is being done.
- Or consider the case of several Ohio hospital nurses whose superiors tried to force them to participate in "therapeutic" abortion procedures, despite the fact that the nurses protested on religious grounds. They were reprimanded and penalized for doing that.
- Or the hospital employee who was ordered to undergo psychoanalysis . . . because of her "religious speech."
- In another college, students who had indicated their disapproval of the homosexual lifestyle were forced into a kind of training and conditioning that would make them more tolerant. They were forced to watch hours of XXX-rated pornographic homoerotic films, while being observed by a professor the whole time. Should they show any signs of disgust or revulsion, they would then be forced to watch more until those reactions disappeared.

Yes, my friends, a lot is going on in our country today that most people are not even aware of.

DISCRIMINATION

The third term beside *relativity* and *tolerance* is the one that we are all familiar with—*discrimination*. What shall we say about discrimination? Let me ask a question. Is discrimination bad or good? Today, in the modern understanding of the word, things are changing. Actually, discrimination may be either good or bad. Discrimination simply means to distinguish between several things, especially to distinguish between things that are similar.

The fact of the matter is found in the definition of “acumen,” which means mental clarity and intelligence—to be able to nicely discriminate between several things. In fact, I remember years ago reading that one of the sure signs of a high I.Q. was that a person with a very high I.Q. could discriminate between two similar things that people with a lower I.Q. could not discriminate between. Did you ever hear of a person having a discriminating palate? If you want to be the food critic for a newspaper, you better have one or you are not going to have a job. If you want to be a wine tester you better have a discriminating palate. If you buy a can of mushroom soup, you will devoutly hope that whoever picked those mushrooms had at least the discriminating ability to tell the difference between mushrooms and toadstools.

But you see, though racial discrimination has long been understood to be wrong, there are few people, I suppose, in this country today that would try to maintain that it is good. We have seen gender discrimination outlawed and condemned—even age discrimination. But you see, again a word has been taken and smeared into areas for which it never was intended.

The city commission of this city voted to take away all of their support from the Boy Scouts of America because they would not allow homosexual Boy Scout leaders to take the little boys out into the woods for a nice weekend. I can’t imagine what’s wrong with the parents that they would not allow that to happen. I’m sure all of you would love to have your twelve-year-old spend the weekend with a homosexual Boy Scout leader. That is ironic! I’m certainly not serious. One of the commissioners said in my hearing that “we just will not allow discrimination of any sort to go on in this city. It is intolerable. We will not tolerate any discrimination about anything.” One of the members of the Broward School Board said in the newspaper that “in our Broward schools we will have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind.”

Hogwash! Those statements are not true. They *do* have discrimination. Will the school board knowingly hire a pedophile? I certainly doubt it. Will they knowingly hire a serial killer? No, they will discriminate against those people. Will they knowingly hire one of the leaders of the neo-Nazi party? Not on your life! Would they hire an activist Ku Klux Klansman to teach social studies in the high school? Never! We must discriminate against all of those people. So it is a lie when they say they will have no discrimination whatsoever.

The truth is, the only people they really want to discriminate against and rule out are Christians. We are the people they want to get rid of. They will tolerate anything but those who have beliefs in dogma and absolutism. Who said that? The United Nations’ Declaration on Tolerance. They will tolerate anything.

But you see, Christianity is an absolute religion. God is the ultimate absolute. His Word is absolute truth. His Son is the absolute divine Savior, so Christianity is an absolute religion, and its dogma or teachings, as the word means, are absolutely true. So who is it that the United Nations is turning their guns on when they say they will not allow dogmatism or absolutism that is intolerable to the UN? Dear friends, if you don’t know it, those guns are pointed at you!

Discrimination is bad in cases such as racial and gender discrimination. But now they want to move into everything—to good and evil. You will notice in our text today Solomon prayed that God would grant to him an understanding heart to discern between good and bad. The word “discriminate” comes from the root *discernere*. That is from the root *cernere*, which means to discern. Therefore the word “discern” is the word from which discriminate comes, and they both

mean virtually the same thing. So Solomon is praying that God would give him an understanding heart and the ability to discriminate between good and evil.

If Solomon had prayed that prayer publicly today, the ACLU would be all over him, for discrimination cannot be allowed. Furthermore, God said that He was very pleased with what Solomon prayed. He answered his prayer so that Solomon is known 3,000 years later as the wisest man that ever lived. So God is guilty, according to the neo-postmodernists of our time and their views on zero tolerance for any kind of discrimination. Folks, we, too, need to pray that God would give us an understanding heart and the ability to discern between good and bad, between good and evil.

Discrimination is the difference between a garden and a jungle, plain and simple. Discrimination is the difference between music and noise. I recently saw a commercial in which a father was sort of jiving to some very loud and raucous music. A child about a year and a half old was sitting in his high chair smashing lids of two big pans together in time with the music. It was literally a deafening sound you heard—it was raucous noise. The commercial went on to say that “you will need our product because sometimes music degenerates into noise.” And what was the product? Tylenol. A lack of discrimination? I guarantee that anyone who walks into a rehearsal of the London Symphony banging a couple of pot lids together will be on the street so fast, he will not know what happened to him.

Discrimination. Let me say this: the difference between barbarism and civilization is discrimination. It is vital that we are able to discern between the bad and the good. But notice that it is the bad and the good—not the black and the white, the old and the young, the male or the female. The ability to discern between good and evil and to choose the good is what makes civilization. When that ability is lost or pounded into the mud, as is being done daily in our schools, eventually a society will degenerate back into the jungle. That is what is going on in our country today.

But, thank God, some positive things are happening. Praise God that He alone brings us the absolute truth. Christianity is growing in spite of the continued attack. It has been said that in ancient centuries the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. In the midst of incredible persecution in the past half century, the Church has grown faster than ever. The Church is growing today at the fastest rate in 2,000 years, with approximately 200,000 converts to Christ every day. That is of great encouragement to me, and I am sure it is to you.

Also, the Church, as far as the number of people who give evidence of truly being born of the Spirit in this country, has grown in the past few decades from about 23 to 30 percent, to 35 to 40 to 43, to 47 percent; I believe that is very encouraging. By the way, those were 1999s figures. I haven't heard figures for the past year. So I believe these forces of godlessness and unbelief and immorality that are forcing all of these changes upon the American people and are totally alien to historic Americanism are in for a big shock.

It's time for Christians to get out of the bleachers and onto the fields. Christians need to get involved or laws may be passed that will have consequences that are going to come back to roost right in your family and in your home. All kinds of pressures to pass those laws are being put upon us all of the time.

Consider this: a school administrator says, “It is the mission of public schools not to tolerate intolerance.” That is their purpose. They will tolerate people coming in and shooting up the classroom. They will tolerate an epidemic of drugs. They will tolerate alcoholism. They will tolerate promiscuous sex. They will tolerate illegitimate children being born to children. They will tolerate blasphemy of every sort, but they won’t tolerate anyone who will not accept all of the views, beliefs, and values of everyone else.

Leslie Armour, a philosophy professor at the University of Ottawa, said that our idea of a virtuous citizen is one who tolerates everything except intolerance.

It has historically been held for 4,000 years that a virtuous citizen is a person who believes in God, a person who believes in morality, a person who disbelieves in immorality and ungodliness, a person who lives a life of virtue and morality and does his best to maintain these values in the society in which he lives. But no longer! The “virtuous citizen” today may be a criminal. He may be a drug addict. He may be an alcoholic. He may be a thief. He may be a pervert. He may be a child molester. He may be any of these things. However, as long as he is tolerant and objects to intolerance, he is all right!

It has been well said that the last virtue of a degenerating population is tolerance. When people no longer live up to any of the moral values that made society great, the last value they hang onto is tolerance. They demand that everybody tolerate their wickedness, and they will tolerate theirs—the last value of a degenerate society.

Well, things are going to change. Let’s make it happen.

PRAYER: Father, we thank you that you are at work, that your Church is growing mightily, and that more and more people are being changed. We believe that America is going to be transformed. O God, help us to prevent the forces of evil, of ungodliness and immorality, from passing laws that are going to force their views upon our children and upon ourselves, until that day when the voices of godliness and decency will once again prevail in this nation. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our King. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on June 17, 2001, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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