

Luke 12:54-59—*He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? ⁵⁷ “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”*

This world is broken and fallen and there are many voices clamoring for attention, claiming to declare truth, secular, religious, and political. The Christian’s response to these voices is crucial and there are many temptations and pitfalls to avoid. Some see enemies and gear up for a fight, responding in kind. Some avoid issues that threaten them; they hunker down and follow the path of least resistance. Others pursue a path of escape from all things unsettling. But God’s people are called not to violence and anger, avoiding the world, or escaping from it. By God’s Holy Spirit, we are called to exercise discernment, wise judgment, and respond in a manner consistent with God’s Word. ***Discernment is the ability to faithfully apply the truth of His Word to the issues, challenges, truth-claims, and values that we meet in an increasingly pluralistic culture.***

Jay Adams defines discernment as "the ability to distinguish God's thoughts and ways from all others," Paul speaks of how he prays for the Christians in Philippi, **Philippians 1:8-11**—*For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

In our passage this morning. Jesus chides the people listening to him; His likely target is especially the Pharisees whom He has addressed already. This crowd is lacking discernment in spiritual matters. The promised Christ stands before them. By their leaders, Jesus is rejected and violently opposed. While, to the average Israelite, Jesus is a novelty and curiosity, and those that believe he is the Christ have a mistaken view of the Christ. ***Let’s consider His charge to the crowd and then I want to give you a list of 10 things that discerning people do. It is an excellent list published by the Gospel Coalition. Remember, the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.***

DISCERNING THE WEATHER, BUT NOT GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD

People uncomfortable in their communication skills, or just not wanting to get into deep matters in conversation, will frequently talk to others about the weather. I imagine people in Jesus' day focused on the weather, too. Prognostication about tomorrow's weather has come along way since Jesus' time. The Weather Channel will give you two weeks' worth of forecasts. But back then people understood the signs in the atmosphere and knew if rain was coming, or if a heat wave and possible drought was in the near future.

Verse 54—He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens.⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. These people understood well the signs in the sky indicating rain or heat.

However, in spiritual matters, they could not read the signs of the times.

Verse 56—You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

What was it that they should have seen and understood had they discerned the signs of the time? That Jesus was the Christ of God who would now complete the work that would finalize the salvation that was, up to that time, just a promise.

William Hendrickson: Did not the coming into this world of the Son of man, with his emphasis on the power, grace, and love of God, rather than on manmade regulations, and with his exhibition of power over everything, including even disease, death, demons, and destructive storms, foretell the downfall of legalistic Judaism? Did it not spell the rise of a church gathered out of both Jews and Gentiles and consisting of all those who believed in salvation by grace through faith and in a life of gratitude to God and of service to man? Were not this coming and that manifestation of power and grace a clear prediction both of the doom of Satan and of the significant strengthening of the kingdom that can never be destroyed? Were these critics utterly blind? Could they not read the handwriting on the wall? Baker New

Testament Commentary – Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke.

Right before He entered Jerusalem for the last time on the day we know as “Palm Sunday,” Jesus wept over the city; . . . **Luke 19:41-44—And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,⁴² saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”**

Jesus is making reference here to the coming destruction of the Temple which occurred in 70 AD as the Roman General, Titus came to Judea and against Jewish rebels in revolt against Roman rule. Why did this judgment befall Jerusalem and the Temple? Because they did not discern the time of their visitation, that is, the time when the promised Christ came to them in power and glory. The utter destruction of the temple revealed that the way to God was no longer through Old Covenant ritual, but now through the person and work of Jesus.

SETTLE AFFAIRS BEFORE YOU STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF THE JUDGE

⁵⁷ “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.

Here is another situation that requires discernment and good judgment. A man is accused by a neighbor; some offence has been rendered for which financial payment is necessary to settle the matter. The two go before a local magistrate, an elder, perhaps, who will work to bring acceptable resolution. Now, Jesus imagines the accused as being recalcitrant and obstinate, not acknowledging his fault. The matter can't be settled and so they go before a judge who judges for the accuser and the obstinate offender receives a stiff penalty—imprisonment and a fine. **Verse 59**—*I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”*

I believe Jesus is giving a thinly veiled call to settle matters with God now, before you stand before Christ in judgment. Bow the knee now to Christ before it's too late. But there is also an application for us in our dealings with other Christians.

Paul teaches us that as believers we have been given a ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21—*From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

If God through Christ has reconciled us to Himself, surely believers can be reconciled to one another. We have access to the Spirit of God, by whose power we are born again and are new creations in Christ. We are called not to see people of true faith as the world sees and judges people. We have God's Word and Spirit which should guide us through a process of reconciliation. This is how believers are to demonstrate to the world the grace, love, and mercy of Christ. In his earlier letter to the Corinthian Churches, Paul admonishes them for taking one another to court before unbelieving judges:

1 Corinthians 6:1-8—*When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴ So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, ⁶ but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!*

So as believers we must learn to exercise careful judgment and discernment with the wisdom that God gives us by His Word and Spirit. The Gospel Coalition has an excellent article on Biblical discernment, listing 10 habits of discerning people.

- 1. They live in right relationship to God.**
- 2. They focus on finding goodness in brokenness.**
- 3. They know the difference between the way things are and the way things should be.**
- 4. They invest in things and relationships that will last.**
- 5. They know the importance of truth.**
- 6. They listen to experts.**
- 7. They pay attention to words and actions.**
- 8. They embrace goodness wherever they find it.**
- 9. They pursue the best possible solution, knowing that no solution is perfect.**
- 10. They use their wisdom to help others.**

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-habits-discerning-people/>