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Of Weak Wills and Wishful Thinking

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In early October 1938 — 83 years ago this week — Nazi German forces marched into the Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia. European leaders, intimidated by Adolf Hitler's bullying, had ceded the territory to Germany just days earlier at a conference in Munich. Massive Czech fortifications that could have provided a stout defense against invasion were instead peacefully abandoned, and the Germans took over the region without firing a shot.

A few days later, Hitler himself made an inspection of some of the empty concrete bunkers. He even tested one by ordering an artillery unit to fire on it. It took several direct hits before the bunker cracked. Quite impressed, Hitler said with a laugh, "What does it matter how strong the concrete is — so long as the will is weak!"

God has provided His people with all the tools we need to resist the assaults of our spiritual enemy, Satan. Paul describes the "armor" that is supplied for our defense: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, God's word. Equipped with these things, we can "resist in the evil day and...stand firm" (Ephesians 6:11-17). But what does it matter how strong the armor is unless I am willing to put it on? What does it matter how mighty the sword is unless I am willing to wield it?

Notice the verbs in this passage: "take up ... resist ... stand firm ... put on ... be on the alert." Such language emphasizes my responsibility to fight the enemy. God provides the armor, but it's up to us to put it on and take the battlefield.

Back to 1938: Upon returning home from the meeting in Munich, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain hailed the agreement as "peace with honour...peace for our time." He thought (or wished) that this concession to the enemy would prevent open conflict. It didn't. The agreement hinged on Hitler's promise to make no further territorial demands — a promise that, it soon became clear, he never intended to keep. The surrender of territory only delayed (and arguably encouraged) the inevitable: within a year, Germany had invaded Poland and Europe was at war.

Satan, likewise, is not an enemy with whom we can make peace. He is "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We may foolishly think we can avoid conflict with him through appeasement — a little compromise of truth here, a little caving to peer pressure there. But we must realize this: the war is already on, and appeasement merely plays into the enemy's hands. Our mandate is, "Be of sober spirit; be on the alert...resist him, firm in your faith" (verses 8-9).

Peter wrote those words to Christians who faced the very real prospect of persecution. As Satan attacked them spiritually, he used others to attack them socially, economically, even physically. There would be immense pressure to avert those assaults by various surrenders (perhaps seemingly small) of their convictions. But to do so would only give Satan the dominion he sought. The same is true for us, regardless of what pressures our enemy may bring to bear, regardless of what concessions we might be tempted to make.

We are at war, folks. Yet "we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Appeasement is not an option; surrender is not an option; only firm resolve and resistance, with faith in "God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). *The Plant City Planter*

Our Need For Discernment

Ryan Hasty

It's hard living in an age in which we're inundated with an excess of information. This makes it all the more important that Christians develop situational insight, otherwise known as "discernment". "Discernment" comes from a Greek word that means "to thoroughly judge back and forth", in which we're able to perceive what is not initially transparent by taking in all the competing input that is thrown our way, appropriately measuring their weights based on a variety of circumstances, and arriving to a correct conclusion that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) and Jesus encouraged us "not [to] judge by appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). In other words, discernment is the ability to see things the way they are and not what we or anyone else wants them to be. The following are general areas in which we need discernment:

1. Right vs. Wrong – Solomon prayed to God to be able to "judge Your people to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9a). But in the story immediately following in which Solomon had to adjudicate between two harlots fighting for custody of a baby, we learn that sometimes what is wrong can look so right and what initially looks right can be so wrong. This is why "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14-15). So, discernment is not just knowing the difference between right and wrong, but as Charles Spurgeon once said, "it is knowing the difference between right and almost right". After all, the best counterfeit money is designed to be as close as it can be to the real thing without being the real thing. As Christians, we must "have [our] senses trained to discern between good and evil" (Heb 5:14).

2. Good vs. Better – In 1 Cor 7, Paul gives the unmarried his opinion on whether they should seek marriage during the "present distress". His judgment is they should remain single (1 Cor 7:25-26), being that marriage brings added burden and responsibility. But he also admitted that if they chose to do so, they would not be sinning (1 Cor 7:28). In fact, marriage is divinely given to us by God. So this was not a matter of "right vs. wrong", rather "good vs. better". And so, in 1 Cor 7:38, he tells the father who gives his daughter in marriage that he "does well", but that the one who does not give her in marriage "will do better". Sometimes we need discernment in areas where it is not necessarily a matter of right vs. wrong, rather the "good path" vs. the "better path".

3. Better vs. Best – However, in 1 Cor 7, Paul adds another variable. While encouraging those single to remain unmarried, he says in 1 Cor 7:9 – "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." Now it's no longer a scenario of "good vs. better", but of "better vs. best". In the present distress, it would be "better" to remain single. But if they struggled with self-control, it would be "best" if they got married. One situation may cause earthly difficulty, but that is temporary. The other situation will cause spiritual difficulty, and that can be permanent. Discernment will allow us to decide between matters in which spiritual implications must usurp natural implications.

4. Permanent vs. Transient – 2 Cor 4:18 – "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." In other words, earthly treasures will burn up, heavenly treasures will not. Physical beauty is unsustainable, spiritual beauty is everlasting. Discernment helps me to know "the extent of my days...how transient I am" (Psa 39:4).

5. Primary vs. Secondary – There are so many spiritual subjects worth debating. But in 1 Cor 15:3-4, Paul labels the gospel that he delivered to the Corinthians as "of first importance". There are primary matters and there are secondary matters. How one ought to worship is a secondary matter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Determining whether one can fall away once they are saved is a moot point for someone who hasn't been truly saved in the first place. There are the finer points of "tithing mint, dill, and cumin" and then there are the "weightier matters" of "justice, mercy, and faithfulness" (Matt 23:23). Discernment allows us to put primary matters first, knowing that with additional teaching, secondary matters often take care of themselves.