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There's what's wrong, what's accurate and there's what's True.

These days you can't afford to be merely "smart."

You have to be wise.

You can't allow yourself to be satisfied with your intellect alone, you have to make use of the Perspective God offers by "testing" what it is that lies before you.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 Jn 4:1)

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**MUSCULAR
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I) Intro

There are three sides to the topics we're dealing with in our society today.

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...there's what's accurate

and then there's what's True

These days you can't afford to be merely smart, you have to be wise. You can't allow yourself to be satisfied with your intellect alone, you have to make use of the Perspective God offers by "testing" what it is that lies before you.

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II) What Does it Mean to be Wise?

To be wise is to evaluate a situation correctly. In order to do that, you need as your starting point a Perfect Resource which is God Himself:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Prov 9:10)

By framing your thoughts according to what's specified in God's Word along with the Guidance that He promises (Ps 143:12), you're now on track to do the right thing at the right time in the right way for all the right reasons (Matt 5:48).

It's not an especially mystical transaction. You pray for instruction and then you let God reveal His Preferences in the context of your circumstance and however else He might shape your mindset (Rom 8:6).

There's one thing, however, that you can do from a purely practical standpoint that Christ Himself demonstrated in the way He responded to some of His detractors...

You have to ask the right questions.

III) Ask the Right Questions

A) When Contending with the Enemy

Throughout the gospels you see the Pharisees asking Him questions that would've revealed Him as a fraud had He not been everything He claimed to be. But rather than "answering a fool according to his folly (Prov 26:4)," He responded with the "right" question that compelled His opponents to acknowledge both their sinister intentions as well as the flawed logic that were attempting to assert as a philosophical given.

Here's an example:

²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰ John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!"

³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." (Mk 11:27-33)

Jesus had no formal training nor academic credentials. While that might be a legitimate cause for concern, John the Baptist didn't have any formal training either. The fact that were willing to validate John as a prophet despite his non-existent resume (Jn 1:19) but not Jesus demonstrates that weren't looking to validate Him as much as they were trying to discredit Him.

But do you see how Christ countered their question with another question? Rather than allowing the flow of the dialogue to be dictated by a hidden agenda, Jesus responds with the "right" question in that it addressed the way the Pharisees were posing as concerned authorities when in fact they were hypocritical assailants.

Ravi Zacharias once said, "When you question someone's question, you compel them to open up about their own assumptions. Our assumptions must be examined."¹ It's the philosophical scaffolding that supports the question that qualifies it as something that is either looking to justify itself or transform itself into something that better accommodates the Truth.

C.S. Lewis reinforces this by saying that "The most dangerous ideas in a society are not the ones being argued, but the ones that are assumed."

Consider the following:

Does the Bible endorse slavery?	What was the punishment in the Old Testament for kidnapping?
	How could Abolitionists base their argument against the slave trade on the Bible if Scripture supported it?
Was every one of our Founding Fathers a born-again Christian?	Who did our Founders identify as the Source of our Freedom?
Don't homosexuals have the right to be happy?	Do homosexuals have the right to redefine Moral Absolutes?
Shouldn't we trust the news?	Shouldn't we want the truth?
Aren't all Christians hypocrits?	Are all church members genuine Christians?
Don't I have the right to choose?	Does your baby have the right to live?
Is the Bible reliable?	Is the integrity of the Bible dependent on the accuracy of man or the Ability of God?
Why does God allow suffering?	Why did Jesus have to die?

You have to ask the right questions.

And while the example of Christ and the above responses demonstrate the utility of the right questions being asked in the context of refuting a flawed premise, it's also a dynamite way to ensure the quality of your own assumptions.

B) When Contending with Yourself

The movie, "Moneyball" is based on the book by the same title authored by Michael Lewis. It stars Brad Pitt and it tells the story of the manager of the Oakland A's who, at one point, deployed a strategy when it came to recruiting new employers that represented a dramatic departure from convention. Instead of going after big ticket all-stars, they focused instead on players that could consistently get on base. Not home run hitters, just solid and consistent ball players that could get on first every time they got up to bat. The result was amazingly successful. That year the A's turned in a winning season and were able to do it at a fraction of the cost that comparable teams were paying for a roster that was supposedly more talented.

Satan is described in Scripture as both a snake and a lion. Put those two illustrations together and you have something that is as vicious as it is subtle. He's not posing as a home run hitter. Rather, he's just trying to get on first. And what happens over time is he keeps advancing runners and before you know it, he's putting points on the board and you're up to your neck in the kind of sin you never thought possible.

Again, it comes back to asking the right questions and laboring to be truly wise as opposed to being merely smart.

1) Politics, Race and COVID-19

Volatile issues are sometimes labeled as “divisive” and therefore something to be avoided altogether in order to better foster a Christian sense of unity, peace and compassion (2 Tim 4:3).

That’s one extreme.

In the middle of the spectrum you have Scripture being applied in ways that resonate as “accurate,” but because the application consists of the Bible being deployed in a manner that is incomplete, the result falls short of true obedience (2 Tim 2:15).

And then there’s the Truth where topics are being processed according to the whole of God’s Word and the resulting approach is profoundly positive (Rom 12:1-2).

Think about it...

In the absence of wisdom...

- Unity becomes Corruption
- Love becomes Neglect
- Peace becomes Indifference
- ...and however you want to be perceived as compassionate, in the absence of wisdom you become an accomplice

So, how do you “stay in the zone?” How do you ensure that you’re being wise?

Ask the right questions. Test the spirits. Kick the tires.

i) Politics

We’re commanded in Scripture to pray for our leaders that we may, “...live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Tim 2:1-3). That’s the goal.

In order to pray intelligently, you need to be engaged just like the men of Issachar (1 Chron 12:32). And when it comes to supporting a particular candidate, you base your decision on the platform and not their personality.

Should you find yourself distracted by what appears to be godlessness on the part of the one you may favor, remember King Cyrus .

King Cyrus was the Persian King who God used to enact legislation that would give the Hebrews the opportunity to rebuild the Temple and the Wall.

But look at what is said of Cyrus in the book of Isaiah:

who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.”’ (Is 44:28)

God calls King Cyrus, “my shepherd.” But in the very next chapter...

For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. ⁵ I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me...(Is 45:28)

King Cyrus didn't know or acknowledge God. For an orthodox Jew, that must've been a hard pill to swallow given the fact that Cyrus was not only a Gentile, but he was an idolater. Yet, God referred to him as "my shepherd" and it was through Cyrus' administration that the Hebrews were able to rebuild their capital city.

"Would you have voted for King Cyrus?"

The example of Cyrus demonstrates that a leader can be a heathen and still be worthy of your support because of the way their platform promotes and protects the work of God.

So the question isn't, "How can I support someone who doesn't acknowledge God?" The question is, "Whose platform is most aligned with that which promotes and protects our nation's spiritual wellbeing?"

Or, another question which better accommodates the whole of Scripture as opposed to those passages that restrict God's usage of individuals to those that honor would be, "Would you have voted for King Cyrus?"

P.S. To write in another name on the ballot or to abstain from the voting process entirely is to withdraw your support of "King Cyrus" and insist that unless God provides the kind of leader that's consistent with your expectations than God's Activity goes unnoticed and both the wall and the Temple remain in ruins.

ii) Black Lives Matter

God evaluates individuals according to their character and not their uniform or their ethnicity (Dt 24:16; Ez 18:20; 1 Cor 3:13). To project the character flaws of a select few on to an entire institution or people group is the very definition of Racism, yet this is the approach represented whenever you hear the term, "Police Brutality" or "White Supremacy." From that standpoint, those who use those terms are the very thing they claim to despise and theirs is an agenda of Destruction and Deception rather than Direction.

You can see this illustrated in the way the Israelites were commanded to treat the "foreigner" in the Old Testament. These "foreigners" were inevitably a part of people group that were among Israel's enemies. It would've been both logical and perhaps even appropriate to assume that these people according to the vile gods they worshipped and the murderous acts they committed against the Israelites.

But commanded the Hebrews to love the foreigner who had agreed to live among the Jews peacefully rather than raise their hand against both Israel and her God. (Ex 22:21; Dt 20:10-15). And what's significant about this is that some of these foreigners would go on to occupy prominent positions in Israel's army, leadership and even a part of Christ's lineage (Uriah [2 Sam 11], Caleb [Num 32:12 {Gen 15:19}], Ruth [Ruth 4:13-22; Matt 1:5]).

This demonstrates conclusively that individuals are gauged according to their merits and not the flaws of their lineage or whatever label society would fix upon them.

Whatever injustices have been committed, they need to be evaluated first in terms of the individuals involved and their personal history before evaluating a system either according to the way it's abused or as a veil to conceal the moral failings of the individual being considered.

So, the question isn't "Do black lives matter?" The question is, "Do you evaluate a person according to their skin or their character?"

iii) COVID-19

The Corona Virus is a very real sickness that can be lethal. Statistically, however, the chances of a person dying from Covid-19 are comparable to dying in an automobile accident.

Proverbs 21:16 says,

Whoever strays from the path of prudence comes to rest in the company of the dead. (Prov 21:16)

To throw caution to the wind is not responsible, but anything taken to the extreme is never wise (Ecc 7:16-18). So the question isn't, "Do we trade the economy for the elderly?" as much as it's, "At what point does 'caution' become destructive?"

IV) Conclusion

Let's review some of the verses that we looked at today:

We just concluded that anything taken to the extreme is never wise:

Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. (Ecc 7:16-18)

In other words, you want to be prudent. In Proverbs 8:12, it says:

I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. (Prov 8:12)

Prudence is a companion of wisdom and wisdom is...

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Prov 9:10)

Whether you're talking about being prudent or avoiding extremes, it all comes down to being wise. And true wisdom is based first and foremost on the Perspective that comes from God.

However obvious a particular issue may be, it's always good to "kick the tires" and test those things that would appear to be givens by asking the right questions. It's in the context of those questions that you're able to discover the assumptions that may be lurking behind those dispositions and it's there where you can ensure that you're not being merely smart...

...but you're being truly wise.

Test the spirits. Ask the right questions. Kick the tires.