

Are You Deciding or Discerning? You Determine.

The raging debate whether the local church should function like typical organizations or the business down the street is, sadly, intriguing. Regardless of the measure you feel “the Body of Christ” should learn or adopt from today’s corporate practices there is one sure difference for the Church. When it comes to setting foundational and or directional conclusions the mandate for the local church is to discern, not decide.

Some churches regularly discern, some cruise along presuming upon the decision-making abilities and strategies of its leadership, and others mistake decision-making with discernment. After many experiences in several different settings I have concluded that there are a few ways of determining if decision-making is more prevalent than discernment.



If deciding is more prevalent than discerning, then:

- The end conclusion is founded more on the grounds of the thoughts, experiences, knowledge or wisdom of those discerning than on unified prayer which results in epiphany. Investigating statistics or being thrilled by popular practices must fall secondary to conversations exploring the exposition and application of Scripture.
- Intimidation or peer pressure is present. An abuse of authority or power is present. Perhaps manifest because of a fear of losing control or out of potential aggravation and discomfort for not having things go their way those in positions of authority can easily short-change discernment as an extension of their superiority.
- There is a meeting before the meeting. Those engaged in the discernment process are persuaded by the thoughts, influences or agendas of others in the discernment process to adopt or sympathize with a particular point of view. Keep the discernment process pure by avoiding the temptation to strategize with “early adopters” or headcounts of the pro and con populations.
- The end conclusion is based more on prevailing personal values or agendas than on God-ordained purposes, or previously discerned values. God is a God of consistency.
- During times of prayer and discernment logical choices or intuitions comprise more thought time than time being spent passionately moved by the Holy Spirit.
- Scenario planning is engaged and the best option is chosen. Scenario planning helps make great decisions; it stifles great discernment.

- Improper balance exists when considering the financial impact. Too little or too grand consideration of financials. The former can lead to irresponsibility and the later to a faith that is too constrained.
- Anyone feels coercion. Discernment is a time for everyone included in its process to have an equal amount of influence. Rights or privileges related to titles, positions, authority and longevity need to be checked at the door.
- Those invited to participate in the discernment process are chosen more because of their spheres of influence, financial resources, networking potential or likely enthusiasm for a point of view than they are for their passion for following Christ, patience in listening for voice of the Holy Spirit or knowledge of Scripture. When discernment is merited the process of ensuring a diversity of those invited to be a part of the process is also merited. Err on inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Doing so ensures discernment is genuine and strengthens the affirmations of discernment.
- Anyone leans more heavily upon the conclusions of others in the discernment process than they do upon reaching their own prayerful conclusions. Agreeability is important, but it comes as the result of discernment in action and not at the hand of weakly engaged discernment. If anyone leans more upon their comfort with the conclusions of others in the discernment process than they do upon their own experience of discernment the joy of possessing the affirmation that discernment can produce is missed.
- The discernment process is rushed. Discernment almost always involves lingering. Trust that God's timing is perfect, He will speak and can be heard when sought after, and that He is interested in working through processes – as opposed to our normal captivation with end results.
- Conclusions are driven more from a basis of fear than from the potential of faithfulness.

What then is discernment? How is it engaged, practically speaking? What guidelines and recommended practices exist to help foster authentic discernment? I look forward to expounding on that in a future article.

Meanwhile, consider that discernment is important because it acknowledges Christ as head of the church. Deciding presumes that our best is sufficient, or even a dominate or preferable leadership. Discernment validates Christ's lordship.

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