

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 6

The Elements of Common Sense and Good Judgment

I. Introduction

- A. "Common sense is indeed a most uncommon trait," wrote one modern-day sage. And he was right. Who, after all, could help but notice that one great reason for the sad state of affairs in society today is the lack of plain old common sense?
- B. The fact that common sense is not very common forms a challenge for those called to serve God's people in leadership positions. It seems that God's people probably lack common sense (like most everybody else) and therefore need the blessing of practical counsel and positive encouragement from the ministry. It also means that the leader himself will have to develop this common sense and good judgment to help God's people.

II. SPS

This lecture will explain how to develop the good judgment and common sense necessary to serve God's people and lead one's own life effectively.

III. Need

- A. Most of us, as a quirk of human nature, tend to believe that while others may not possess good judgment, we ourselves automatically do, as some sort of mental birthright. Perhaps we don't consciously think this way, but unconsciously we just assume we are totally sound-minded. This, of course, is a reflection of our vanity or pride. As the proverb states, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes."
- B. However, the truth is just the opposite. We do develop certain mental instincts automatically, but not good judgment. For, as Solomon wrote, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man [that is, there is a way that seems right automatically to us], but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Read also Jeremiah 10:23 and Isaiah 55:7-9. Our automatic ways are the ways of death -- the way of

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mental suicide. It may be the common way of thinking, but it is not very sensible.

IV. Just What Is Good Judgment?

- A. The terms common sense, good judgment and wisdom are really about equivalent.
- B. To understand what good judgment or wisdom or common sense is, we must first define some other terms:

1. Knowledge

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts. Numerous verses tell us to gain knowledge. For example, see Proverbs 10:14 and 15:14.

2. Understanding

Understanding is the ability to perceive what the facts (knowledge) say about the world. This is an important distinction and deserves some thought. We all know people who seem to have good memories yet really don't seem to understand their subjects.

An inept car mechanic illustrates the point. He may know the parts of your car, but because he does not understand how these parts work together, he cannot find the malfunction to fix it.

3. Wisdom

Also termed good judgment and common sense, wisdom is the ability to take the facts, with proper understanding of them, and steer a proper and effective course to a desired end or goal. Wisdom is indispensable in making proper decisions.

Wisdom is the ability to properly use knowledge.

4. Character

Finally, character is the willpower to implement the proper course of action once a right decision is made.

Solomon is a good example of the distinction between character and wisdom. Solomon possessed knowledge, understanding and wisdom, but apparently did not always have the character to do the right thing.

V. The Wisdom of This World Versus the Wisdom of God

- A. The purpose of this lecture is to teach sound-minded judgment that comes from God. This type of common sense or wisdom is far different from the way that seems right to man and never would win acclaim from people. Notice the difference between the two:
1. I Corinthians 2:1-13 -- These verses show that Paul did not use the wisdom of this world, but, instead, his reasoning was based upon God and His Son who died for us.
 2. James 3:15-17 -- The wisdom from above and the wisdom of this world are compared.
- B. Man's way of thinking, including his system of logic and his type of judgment or wisdom, is called the way that leads to death. But the wisdom of God leads to eternal life. Notice Romans 8:6: "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Carnal wisdom brings death. Spiritual common sense brings eternal life.
- C. It is as if there are two separate systems of logic -- man's and God's. God plainly tells us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:7-9). We, of course, wish to learn the good judgment and common sense of God and not the wrong reasoning of man. It is important, therefore, to understand this: Although a carnal mind and a spiritual mind both reason with a physical brain, and both follow the same general steps in their reasoning, each many times reaches a far different conclusion about a matter than the other.
- D. Here are the differences in the way a carnal mind reasons and the way a spiritual mind reasons. It is these differences that account for the difference in man's judgment and God's judgment.
1. Different Facts
When forming an opinion or judgment, the carnal mind uses only the information or facts that it can gather through the five senses. It excludes all other facts and therefore remains in ignorance of them. The spiritual mind, on the other hand, takes into account revealed knowledge from God. Read Daniel 2:28 and I Corinthians 2:9-16. Adam and Eve rejected revealed knowledge from God in the Garden of Eden.

For example, one who reasons carnally will not tithe because he will not believe that his income will cover his needs. He will look at his budget and see that the physical facts say that. But a converted mind will accept additional facts about tithing that the carnal mind does not -- namely, that God will provide our needs if we tithe.

2. Different Goals

A carnal mind will reason differently from a spiritual mind because the ultimate goal of the carnal mind is to merely reach temporary physical goals such as wealth, power and status. The spiritual mind is working toward unseen, eternal life in God's Kingdom.

For example, a carnal mind will grieve if it has to suffer wrongfully, while a spiritual mind can glory since it knows that the character built thereby works toward the Kingdom of God.



3. Different Motives

Our motives affect the way we think. They color our conclusions. Carnal man's motive is to get and glorify himself. God's motive is to give. In John 7:17-18 Christ said His motive was to glorify God and not Himself. For that reason, His listeners could believe what He said, knowing that there was no unrighteousness in Him.

[No matter how hard man may try to be "objective" and "fair" with the facts, he cannot be impartial when his motive is self-centered. In fact, it is for this very reason that men reject God in their moral decisions, such as about premarital sex. Their motives (to do what they want) color their thinking.

4. Different Values

Judgments are made when facts are considered. In addition to using different facts than God does, people also weigh those facts differently in their minds. That is, their values -- what seems to be important to them -- are different than God's. See Luke 16:15). This, of course, affects their conclusions.

People value power, fame, wealth and appearance (I John 2:15-16). But the spiritual mind values the things of God (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Luke 10:38-42 shows an excellent example of this. Mary thought it logical to sit at Christ's feet and hear His words, because she valued the things of God, while Martha thought it more important to be cumbered about with much serving. They were both doing what they thought was right, but they reasoned differently because they had different values.

Another example is that of suffering. Men eschew all suffering and believe it to be bad. The spiritual mind instead "counts it all joy" when a trial occurs because of the good character it will produce (James 1:2).

VI. Good Judgment Can Be Learned

- A. Since we are not born with godly judgment, we must be trained. But as obvious as this seems, it is good to emphasize that common sense and good judgment can be learned. Just as surely as some wrongly believe that we are born with good judgment, others will believe that it is impossible to rise above their present state of thinking. Read Proverbs 2:1-10. These verses state dogmatically that we can increase our knowledge, understanding and wisdom or good judgment.
- B. The key to learning good judgment is to realize this: Good judgment consists not in memorizing every possible answer to every possible problem, but rather in learning the relatively few principles of godly thinking and applying these principles to each unique problem as it arises.

VII. The Elements of Good Judgment and Common Sense

The following principles provide a foundation for wise thinking and good judgment. Strive to learn these principles, and you will be learning good judgment in the process.

A. Asking If Something Is Right or Wrong

One who wishes to exercise godly judgment will first ask if what he is about to do is morally right or wrong. Today people in our society do not do this. In fact, they do the opposite. Scientists many times brag that they do not wish to introduce questions of right or wrong into their research. Today people instead ask themselves, "Do I want to do this?" or "Will this make money?" They don't care if it is right or wrong. In fact, they say that right is wrong and wrong is right (Isaiah 5:20).

A godly person knows he will reap what he sows, and knows that a good decision must be morally right. He will do what is right even if the wrong way is what he carnally wants to do, or even if it will make millions.

? A good example of this principle would be a landlord who unfairly raises rent on a widow because he wants to make the extra money. It may be financially sound to raise the rent, but morally wrong and therefore not something a spiritually minded person with sound judgment would do.

B. Consistency

One great principle of the Bible is that our living God is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). This consistency, this utter reliability, is at the heart of the perfect running of the universe itself. Yet we humans sometimes fall out of harmony with this maxim. But realize this: One who is inconsistent, wavering from one side to the other, must be wrong at least part of the time.

Being consistent does not mean being stubborn or refusing to change when wrong. It means, rather, that you always arrive at the same right conclusion when confronted with the same circumstances.

A common example of how we often fail to be consistent is in our child rearing. If we inconsistently discipline our children, correcting them one time for something and then neglecting the same infraction the next time, we just confuse the child. Such confusion does not come from a mind led by the principles of judgment.

Even worldly courts understand and at least profess to abide by this principle. They call it stare decisis, a Latin term meaning to abide by or adhere to decided cases. We know it is the same system of relying upon precedent -- that is, the practice of deciding subsequent cases the same way as the first case was decided, as long as there is no compelling reason not to.

C. Balance

It is human nature to go to extremes. Therefore at times one can be either a "hanging-judge" type of minister or an "easygoing" type. But this quality of human nature does not really serve the righteous judgment of God. Rather, we must constantly strive for the proper balance in our administration of the local church and in other duties under our control.

This, of course, does not mean we compromise with sin. Sin is sin and it is always bad and wrong. But we do balance our actions with mercy and judgment. And we must exhibit God's quality of "temperance" (Galatians 5:22-25), doing nothing to excess, but all things that are appropriate in moderation.

Again, child rearing serves as an excellent example. Why is it that some people almost never spank their kids, and yet others are guilty of beating them constantly? It is because they do not understand the role of temperance and balance.

D. Objectivity

To be objective means to be aware of the emotion of the moment, but not to let it rule our minds and actions. We all know from experience that emotions are powerful forces and that they can affect our judgment. A person with godly judgment will not let this happen, even if it means that he must delay a decision or an action until he is in control of his emotions and can make a calm and rational decision based upon the facts. God says He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). God has emotions, but He is always able to exercise control and not allow emotion to cloud His judgment.

Read James 1:20: "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." The same could be said of fear, jealousy, revenge and many other destructive emotional states.

How many parents have spanked their children too hard because of anger, or not hard enough because of a child's tears? Clearly, one with Christian common sense must strive to be objective in his decisions and actions.

E. Sensitivity and Perceptiveness

Sad to say, many people fail to deal with certain situations that should command their time simply because they fail to even see that they exist. At times, we all seem oblivious to problems or situations. Maybe it is because we don't want to see them, or because we just are insensitive. But a person with good common sense is aware of the subtleties and nuances of each situation under his leadership.

Read Matthew 9:1-4, where we see how sensitive Christ was to the thoughts, moods and motives of those around Him. Ask God to give you this same sensitivity.



Matthew 7:3-5 tells how we may grow to be more sensitive. It tells us to root our own sins out of our lives, and then we will more sensitively and accurately see the spiritual needs of others. Another way we may become more sensitive is through experiences. Through experiences we learn what the warning or tell-tale signals of a problem are, so we can decipher problems early when we see similar symptoms again.

F. Experience

Experience is more than just a teacher of sensitivity, however. The ability to learn by experience -- both our own and those of others -- is a profound quality mastered by relatively few people. The old saying is true: "The one thing we have learned from history is that we have never learned anything from history."



This is not to say that you should sin so you will be an authority on the subject. It means merely that you learn from the past so you can do repeat successes and do not repeat failures. In fact, if you are able to learn from the experiences of others, you can avoid many mistakes common to man.

In I Corinthians 10:6, God plainly tells us that one reason for the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is so we may learn from the experiences of others so we don't have to repeat their mistakes.

G. Uniqueness of a Problem

Although one with common sense learns from his experiences, he also understands that every circumstance is in some ways unique. One with good judgment, therefore, does not blindly apply some principle or maxim to a situation without further thought.

One powerful lesson of the New Testament is that the self-righteous Pharisees were inflexible and unable to discern properly between similar yet not identical circumstances. It was for this very reason that Christ had to rebuke them for applying the law of the Sabbath so strictly and mechanically that they chided their master (Christ) for healing on that day. Anyone with common sense would have seen that the rule against work on the Sabbath was not broken by Christ's doing good. Read Matthew 12:9-13.

For an excellent example, read about the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27:1-11. They sensed that their special circumstances were an exception to the rule

that a man's inheritance passed through his eldest son. In response to their inquiry, God said, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right" (verse 7).

H. Relative Importance

One who would have keen judgment must be able to direct attention to the important facets of a matter and exclude or minimize less important points. Even a fool wouldn't prepare for a car trip by fixing a hole in the upholstery yet ignoring faulty brakes. He would see that, under the circumstances, the brakes should receive his attention. Yet many of us find it difficult to concentrate on the truly important issues of a matter. We get sidetracked in unnecessary details.

The ability to concentrate on the important things demands that we master three qualities:

1. Focus -- the ability to see through a complex matter to its core issues.
2. Priorities -- the ability to know what facets must be dealt with in what order.
3. Proportion -- the ability to know how much weight to give each separate set of facts.

Note: Lawyers and judges deal with these principles under such headings as relevance, competence and materiality. While they deal with man's inferior laws, nonetheless the ability to see what is important in a decision and what is not is vital for leaders in God's Church.

No better example of this rule can be found than Luke 10:38-42, about Martha. Another example is that of the Pharisees. Read Matthew 23:23. They had no sense of the relative importance of the basic truths of God compared to the practice of minutely tithing the smallest herb.

I. Moot Points

Good judgment many times requires tough decisions between difficult alternatives. But one with common sense also realizes this: Some decisions don't have to be made! That's right, sometimes it doesn't make any difference what you do. There indeed are such things as "no-win" and "no-lose" situations. Frankly, merely knowing that sometimes you cannot win or cannot lose helps you look for this type of situation and gives you the confidence to sit back and do nothing when you should do nothing. But beware.

It is human nature to feel defeated when you are not, or to be cocky and self-sure in the face of uncertain events. Don't use this simple truth as an excuse to be lazy or to fail when you should succeed. For such actions will not be common sense, but common nonsense.

J. Dealing With the Obvious

When making decisions or judgments we must not overlook the obvious. Yet many people do. It seems to appeal to the vanity in human nature to look deeply into things, far past the surface into the complex inner workings, and to search there for answers. But many answers are right out in the open if we will simply see and accept them.

One great illustration of the wrong approach of ignoring the obvious is how some well-intentioned psychologists probe into the secret and seamy past memories of their patients to find why they feel guilty at committing some sin -- adultery, for example. Why do they not merely see the obvious -- that one should feel guilty, and should quit? Because their vanity wants to be erudite and abstruse and deep.

K. Timing

Ecclesiastes 3:1 plainly states that there is a "time for every purpose under the heaven." Therefore some actions and decisions will be appropriate or inappropriate depending upon when they are done or decided. Any actor can tell you the importance of proper timing. Any farmer knows there is a proper time to sow his seed and another time to reap the crop.

Thus a leader who possesses godly judgment and common sense will consider the timing involved before blurting out a decision or making a judgment. Certainly no minister of God's Church would baptize a child. Yet he would immediately baptize that same person, when ready, as an adult. This is but one example of the importance of timing in common sense.

L. Leaving One's Options Open

A Christian must at times take a stand on an important issue and burn his bridges behind him. Yet, at other times such finality is not required nor preferred. In many cases a leader must leave his options open.

A simple yet practical example would be planning a picnic. Although he hopes it will not rain, and thus

plans many outdoor activities, he also may arrange to use a gymnasium for the social instead, if the weather turns bad. Leaving one's options open this way many times merely means planning for contingencies.

M. Balancing Risks

A leader with common sense always compares alternatives and seeks to balance the risk of his decisions with potential benefits. In fact, a person who unwisely decides to follow his own reasoning and live life without God's law directing him has done just this. He has not considered the risky end of his foolish ways. He has chosen to ignore, or not consider at all, that God's way ends in life (although it may be difficult for now), and that man's ends in death. Remember Christ's warning: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

N. Consider the End



There is a cause for every effect. That being true, it is wise to consider exactly what final effect our actions will bring. Often people simply do what they wish or what seems right emotionally, without realizing that their actions and attitudes will cause a specific result, good or bad. Galatians 6:7 states the case succinctly: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

O. The Spirit of the Law

Finally, no man can claim to properly guide God's people without understanding the need to act within the spirit of God's law. Simply stated, this means we ought to conform our decisions to the intent of the law and not merely the letter. In most cases, obeying the spirit of the law means obeying the letter as well as going beyond it.

For example, the command against adultery forbids lust, also (Matthew 5:27-28). Yet sometimes obeying the letter allows a technical breach of the command, as in the case of David and the shewbread, recorded in Matthew 12:3-8. Truly, it takes great understanding and wisdom to always apply the spirit and intent of God's perfect law.

VIII. Roadblocks to Learning Good Judgment

With all that has been said about common sense and good judgment, there remains yet this: Human nature can work

against itself and block its own quest to learn wise thinking. Here are some roadblocks to straight thinking:

A. Vanity and Self-righteousness

Read Galatians 6:3. Admitting you are wrong is one of the most difficult things to do. Yet to grow in good sense, we must constantly dispose of incorrect ideas. The ability to admit wrong is one important mark of a good leader.



B. Ignorance

Good judgment must be based upon knowledge. If we know little about a subject, we can hardly make decisions concerning it. Therefore an ignorant man cannot be a wise one (Proverbs 1:5).

C. Fear

Making decisions is not easy. It risks opening one to being wrong and ridicule. But if fear makes us shirk from decisions, colors our reasoning or influences our choices, it causes bad judgment. Remember, true courage is not the absence of fear. Without fear there is no need for courage. True courage is the ability to achieve the proper goal in spite of fear. Courage is not yielding to fear.

D. Impatience

Snap decisions made in an effort to get the job over with run a great risk of being wrong. Yet "patience" is not synonymous with "indecisiveness."

E. Laziness

Even Solomon put great effort into learning good judgment, as can be seen by the fact that he collected and memorized so many proverbs and songs (I Kings 4:32). It takes effort to grow in grace and knowledge. You have to work at it. Is it worth working for?

IX. Conclusion

Even before Solomon was given wisdom from God, he was smart enough to see he needed it to rule God's people. That is why he asked for it in the first place. We as leaders in God's Church, who rule over God's people, certainly have no less a need for wisdom. The rewards of solid common sense and good judgment are many. As Proverbs 4:7 says, "Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."