

Binah, Tevunah and Discerning Love

Appoint for yourselves wise, understanding, and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will make them your leaders. – Deuteronomy 1:13 HCSB

King Solomon had a remarkably pithy, if not always pleasant, way of putting things. “Don't eat a stingy person's bread and don't desire his choice food, for as he thinks within himself, so he is. ‘Eat and drink’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you. You will vomit the little you've eaten and waste your pleasant words.”¹

We immediately recognize the truth of what he said, but like children first trying to grasp algebra, we can't always recognize when to apply the formula! How do we **know** that the person who has invited us to their house for a meal is stingy? After all, their invitation to “eat and drink” would seem to belie their innermost character flaw.

Paul told us to test everything, to hold fast to what is good, and to abstain from every form of evil². These three elements combined form a working definition of the concept we need - “*binah*”, which is the Hebrew word for discernment. Discernment is etymologically related to “discrimination”, a word which has received a lot of bad press lately.

But without the ability to understand (*tevunah*) what is right and wrong and without the courage to discriminate against evil, how can we say that we possess true *binah* (discernment)? *Binah* is impossible without *tevunah*. Discernment is impossible without discriminatory understanding.

Binah and *tevunah* are such important concepts that Paul directly correlated this type of discernment to love, describing abounding love as possessing accurate knowledge and full discernment.³ He commanded elsewhere⁴ that “Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.”

There's a lot of talk today about love, grace and light. But the truth of the matter is that it is impossible to love without hating. I love my children so I hate anyone or anything that might cause them harm.

I love homosexuals. But I hate homosexuality. Why? Because I think their sin more repugnant than mine? Not at all. Heterosexual lust is no less a sin than homosexual lust. But I believe (and the Red Cross seems to agree) that their chosen lifestyle is risky. Because I love them, I want them to live long healthy lives. I don't want to see them harmed. Therefore, I discriminate against their behavior and protest in love, “Please don't harm yourselves!”

So be loving, gracious and compassionate. But also be discerning. Unite knowledge and discernment to your love, controlling what you say in a cool spirit. Imitate the Master who exemplified the perfect balance between grace and truth.⁵ Exercise *binah* and *tevunah* so that you may love in truth, without hypocrisy.

¹ Proverbs 23:6-8

² 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

³ Philippians 1:9

⁴ Romans 12:9

⁵ John 1:14