

Sermon Title: Discernment And Kerfuffleology
Scripture Text: 1 John 4:1-3

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-24-24

Well, my friends, this past Lord's Day we saw, in our studies in Acts Chapter 15, the record of Paul and Barnabas having what is translated in our Bibles as "a sharp disagreement" over Barnabas' desire to take his nephew John Mark on the next missionary journey (Acts 15:39, NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted). They never could come to an agreement about that, so they ended up forming two teams for the same purpose.

This morning, we are *not* going to make any headway in the Book of Acts. I decided to seize this opportunity to piggyback on the study of that passage about believers disagreeing about something, to deal with a small avalanche of questions that came my way over the past few months—and hence, I have a one-of-a-kind sermon title: "Discernment and Kerfuffleology." I want to help you think through what is absolutely required for every Christian, which is: spiritual discernment (Prov. 23:23; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:17; Col. 1:9). And I want to help you think through how to handle disagreements when brothers and sisters in Christ come to disparate conclusions—*not* about the teaching of Scripture, but about how to *apply* Scripture to life situations, and neither viewpoint is a matter of rejecting or ignoring sound doctrine.

So, two goals for our time in God's Word today: First, I want to help you grasp what is a matter of true discernment versus what is a matter of personal conviction; there is a very important distinction. Second, I want to respond to that avalanche of questions about a controversy ignited by the words of a beloved Bible teacher.

Back in my New Year's sermon—which became a series—I ran out of time, and I actually made one part of it into a pamphlet out there: "Pastoral Advice For Surviving A Presidential Election Year." You might call this: "Pastoral Advice For Surviving Kerfuffles."

And here is a spectacularly insightful, fully detailed sermon outline:

Number 1: Discernment
Number 2: Kerfuffleology

Let's start with Discernment.

Just to touch on this, we read in Philippians Chapter 1, Verses 9 and 10—"And this I pray"—so, here is an Apostle praying for friends of his where he had been the founder of their church—"this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."

You see, real "love" requires—right there in the same sentence—"all discernment." Christian "love"—wonderful—it goes hand in hand with Christian "discernment," which is the ability to "approve the things that are excellent" (cf. Rom. 12:2, 9). And the implication is: You have to trim away the things that take away from that (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6; Jas. 3:17). So you need to be able to identify and turn away from things less than excellent (1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:21).

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Another familiar passage that uses that same terminology: Hebrews 5:14—"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." So as with love, Christian *maturity* goes hand in hand with discernment—knowing how to "discern good and evil."

Now, in those verses, there are different Greek words for "discern" and "discernment." The Greek language has more subtleties, and we don't have as many words in English to match them. But [the words for "discernment"] share the idea of having keen perception, of making distinctions between right and wrong, true and false, good and evil.

There is a wonderful quote on this subject which you will almost always find attributed to Charles Spurgeon. No one can find where Charles Spurgeon ever said this or wrote it—oh, but it's a great quote! "Discernment is not knowing the difference between 'right' and 'wrong,' it is knowing the difference between 'right' and 'almost right.' "

Cults and the whole Charismatic Movement and the Prosperity Gospel—they all *thrive* because of a pandemic of Bible ignorance among professing Christians (see Prov. 1:7; 2:6; Is. 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17), and that ignorance is perpetuated by insipid preaching and by feelings-driven attitudes about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ—it's all about *feeling* a certain way (cf. Prov. 28:26). No, it's all about standing in a certain *relationship* to God through His Son (Jn. 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Pet. 3:18).

Polling continues to verify that more than half the people in America who *claim* to be "Evangelicals"—so, what are we talking about? "Evangelical" means "those who believe in the *euangelion*": the "good news" (Is. 52:7; 61:1; Rom. 10:15; Heb. 4:2, 6), "the gospel" (Mk. 1:14-15; Lk. 4:18; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13), those who believe that "the gospel" is "that Christ died for our sins...He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1, 3-4); *that* is "the gospel." More than half of the people in America who say, "I am an Evangelical" *cannot articulate the Gospel*—which is the *definition* of being an "Evangelical"!

Now, there are important things to distinguish between crucial doctrine—whether Jesus became something at His birth, or if He was *always* the Second Person of the Trinity; whether the first 11 chapters of Genesis are history or mythology. Does baptism play a role in salvation? Can you lose your salvation? Should churches refer people to psychologists and psychiatrists if they are habitually committed to certain sins, or if they are anxious or depressed? There are things that *need* to be understood.

And then there are things that are less important: Did Adam have a navel? How many warts will there be on the nose of the Antichrist? Is the current Pope the Antichrist? Is the Earth flat?

There are specific orders from God about putting theological things to the test, and we need to discern "right" from "almost right." The essence of discernment is: Putting things to the test by the statements of Scripture (see Is. 8:20; cf. Ps. 19:7-9; 119:98-100, 104-105, 128, 130, 137, 151, 160; Jn. 17:17; Acts 17:11; 2 Pet. 1:19). And Number 1 on the list of importance is: Getting the Doctrine of Christ right (1 Jn. 2:22).

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First John Chapter 4, Verse 1. The aged John the Apostle wrote this to people who he had ministered to for decades. He said: "Beloved, 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." The command is: "Test the spirits." And by putting the word "spirits" in juxtaposition to "many false prophets," it is clear that John was saying that behind every false teaching about Jesus Christ lies a demon who is inspired by Satan (see 1 Tim. 4:1; cf. 2 Cor. 11:14-15)—who doesn't care if you believe in Jesus, as long as you don't define Him quite right. Put it to the test.

Go on to the next two verses: Verses 2 and 3 of First John 4—"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." You see, there was a teaching that Jesus was a good man, and then he was so enlightened that the "Christ-spirit" came upon him later. John said, "No, no! Jesus came in the flesh. Jesus—God the Son—came in the flesh" (Jn. 1:1, 14). He continues: "And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."

Now, we speak often around here about the need for discernment. We just saw a *whopper* in Acts Chapter 15, where the first huge test of the early church on this matter of the Gospel came: The Jerusalem Council had to deal with the *very definition* of what it takes to be saved, what must you believe to be saved. And it was in light of the "Judaizers," who said it is necessary to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

There are going to be many more opportunities to deal with discernment in the Book of Acts, and we will get to them. And we will relentlessly do all we can, not only to help you grow in your ability to discern to the point that you can distinguish between "right" and "wrong," but between "right" and "almost right," but to make those applications to new things that come your way.

If you get really astute in discernment, you might even be able to discern whether quotes like that one is correctly attributed to Charles Spurgeon. Here's a hint: If you think of a pithy way to say something related to the Christian life—especially if it is clever—say it came from Spurgeon. No one will check you out, and they'll think of you, "Wow! What a theologian! What a historian!"

There is a very current example. We talked about it just a few minutes at our elders' meeting this past week. You have heard of the "He Gets Us" campaign. It is a *powerful* example of the need for discernment. *Tens of millions of dollars* are being spent on this "Jesus Gets Us" or "He Gets Us" campaign. You see it on billboards. I see it sometimes behind home plate at a baseball game, or on the boards at a football stadium. It is all over the place.

Now, *of course*, Jesus "gets us"! I mean, He is "God" (Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1; cf. Col. 2:3, 9). He really does "get us." He is omniscient. He "gets us" better than we "get us"! He knows "the thoughts and intentions" of our "hearts" (Heb. 4:12; cf. Matt. 9:4; 12:25; Jn. 2:24-25; 16:30; 21:17; Rev. 2:23). But the "He Gets Us" *campaign* promotes a *deficient* and downright *inaccurate* Gospel.

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Back around Christmas, there was an array of advertisements that portrayed Jesus' mother Mary as a poor, unwed mother. Now, that *blatantly* contradicts Scripture! "So we are going to tell you where Jesus came from, and we are going to *lie* about it" (e.g., Jn. 8:41). And it omits the *absolutely essential* Doctrine of the Virgin Birth! Oh, and by the way: *She was married*—that's part of the story (Matt. 1:24-25).

Then, just a few weeks back, another wave came with the Super Bowl ads this year, where they twisted the event of Jesus washing feet, and they had a whole bunch of people washing other people's feet; and they presented a "social gospel" that had no reference to sin, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the Deity of Christ, repentance. It's as if the message is that *Jesus needs us!* "He really needs us on His side, and we want you to act a certain way, and we want the 'oppressing' classes to wash the feet of the 'oppressed' classes!" There was CRT *all through that!* It's more like they are saying, "Jesus is our homeboy" than "He is our Lord and Savior."

That is a little bit about discernment, just to remind you: I'm not saying anything [that is] *unsaying* anything we have ever said about discernment.

Now, to the main event from the recent internet storm that ravaged the world of cyber-evangelism. I want to move on to "Kerfuffleology." I just made that up this week, and I *really like it!*

"Kerfuffle" is a *perfectly good*, absolutely appropriate word to describe what happened recently in the realm of American Evangelicalism. Consider the definition. And I did not make this up; this is quoted: A "kerfuffle" is "some kind of commotion, controversy, or fuss." If you read about a scandal in a newspaper, it could be described as a "kerfuffle." "Kerfuffle" is a humorous sounding word for a mostly non-humorous situation: some kind of disturbance, scandal, or mess.

However, a "kerfuffle" usually *is not* a hundred percent serious. Some people talking loudly in public could be making a "kerfuffle." If a politician says something embarrassing by accident, it could cause a "kerfuffle." Often, people use this word when they think people are making too big a deal of something, as in: "What is the 'kerfuffle' all about?"

Now, if you are keeping score at home, you might want to start counting the number of times I use the word "kerfuffle"—I am *really* enjoying it! But it is perfect.

So, a question: What is the subject of this "kerfuffle" to which I refer?

Alistair Begg is the pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio, and has been since 1983—so, 40-plus years. He is known *far* beyond the reach of the local ministry. He is the voice on the radio for the "Truth For Life" radio broadcast, heard on over 1,800 stations—or, until *recently*, heard on over 1,800 stations.

Back in September of last year, Pastor Begg appeared on someone's podcast in conjunction with promoting a book that he wrote called "The Christian Manifesto." And in the midst of the conversation, he related a story to the person who was interviewing him;

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it was his answer to a question from a grandmother. There was no outcry when this first happened in 2023; but in January of 2024, an online ministry called "Church Leaders" published his comments.

Now, I don't want to misrepresent anybody, so I am going to read his exact words. Oh, I *wish* I could do it in his Scottish accent! I mean, *you would believe anything* if you heard it said with that delightful way of speaking. Well, I can't do the accent, so let me just read to you what Begg said:

"We field questions all the time that go along the lines of: 'My grandson is about to be married to a transgender person, and I don't know what to do about this, and I am calling to ask you to tell me what to do'—which is a huge responsibility. And in a conversation like that just a few days ago—and people may not like this answer—but I asked the grandmother, 'Does your grandson understand your belief in Jesus?' 'Yes.' 'Does your grandson understand that your belief in Jesus makes it such that you can't countenance, in *any* affirming way, the choices that he has made in life?' 'Yes.' I said, 'Well, then, okay. As long as he knows that, then I suggest that you *do* go to the ceremony. And I suggest that you buy them a gift.' 'Oh,' she said, 'what?' She was caught off guard. I said, 'Well, here's the thing: Your love for them may catch *them* off guard, but your absence will simply reinforce the fact that they said, 'These people are just what I always thought: judgmental, critical, unprepared to countenance anything.' " Begg added, referencing his own advice: "We are going to have to take that risk a lot more if we want to build bridges into the hearts and lives of those who don't understand Jesus and don't understand that He is a King."

Now, what made the "kerfuffle" explode? It didn't happen when he first said it; it was only when it got broadcast.

Well, it wasn't Alistair Begg that did it. It wasn't the grandmother he gave the advice to, or the grandson involved in the faux-marriage. I wonder how *they're* feeling these days. It wasn't the elders of Parkside Church. It wasn't any denominational authorities. The "kerfuffle" exploded in the *wild west* of the Internet. And one of the first "kerfuffle" headlines I read said Alistair Begg had "bought into the LGBTQ agenda." Another said he has "compromised his beliefs." And *immediately* came calls for him to repent of his sinful advice. Well, a couple of weeks later, after Pastor Begg met with the elders of his church, he preached a sermon in which he stood by his advice, and said that he did not need to repent. I had a couple of issues with that sermon, but that is beyond the purpose of today.

Then the Internet vigilantes roared back: "Begg has doubled down on his sin!" An organization called "American Family Radio" that owns 80 Christian radio stations—they stopped airing "Truth For Life" on all 80 of their stations nationwide. Countless blogs and podcasts continued to call for Alistair Begg to repent. Some of them, including one produced by a friend of mine, followed this logic—see if you can follow the reasoning: A same-sex so-called "marriage," or one involving a transgender person, is not a marriage. That is patently true. To attend a marriage ceremony implies celebrating the union; and *therefore*, to attend a *faux wedding* for a non-marriage is a *sin* because it

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celebrates what is an abomination to God. Therefore, to suggest attending such a wedding is *also* a sin. Therefore, to *refuse to repent* of recommending attendance is to *continue in sin*. Therefore, Alistair Begg is living in ongoing, willful sin. Therefore, no one who holds to the biblical definition of marriage should recommend the ministry of Begg—at least until he repents of giving and standing by sinful advice.

Alongside that, some of the voices in the wild west of the Internet screamed that Alistair Begg was *expelled* from speaking at the Shepherd's Conference this year. Now, I was at the Shepherd's Conference this year. Alistair Begg didn't speak. He had been scheduled to speak, but he didn't. Here's what actually happened in the *real* world: John MacArthur and Alistair Begg—who are friends, *good* friends—they spoke in person about it. They both agreed that the noise from the Internet kerfuffle would be a big distraction at the conference, and so Begg agreed to withdraw from the event. But that doesn't get you as many "clicks" and "likes" and "subscriptions" as saying that "he was *expelled*," "he was *dropped*," "the invitation was *rescinded*!" No. Two friends talked about it, and decided that is how they would handle it.

Now, what does God say?—as if you need to hear this.

Just because you use the word "marriage" to define a relationship between two people of the same sex *does not make it a marriage*. God defines that quite precisely: Marriage is the union of a "man" and a "woman" (1 Cor. 7:2) in a "covenant" made in His sight (Mal. 2:14). Jesus quoted from Genesis (1:27; 2:24) in Mark Chapter 10, Verses 6-8— "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female." Oh, and by the way: That is an *exhaustive* list of all the genders, right there! "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh."

Now, in *all* cultures, it is the common assumption that attending a wedding implies that you are *celebrating* the union (see Sol. 3:11; Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11; Matt. 9:15; 22:2; 25:10; Lk. 12:36; 14:8; Jn. 3:29; Rev. 19:7). I don't think that is even up for debate. *That* is why I would not give the advice that Pastor Begg gave to the grandmother. I think he was *dead on the right track* [when he said], "Do they understand your commitment to Jesus? Do they understand that you absolutely cannot, in *any* affirming way, support what they are doing?"—that was *good*! But I think there are other ways to handle it, and *better* ways to handle it.

But Pastor Begg was clear that the *motive* for *why* he encouraged attendance is: "We want to build bridges into the hearts and lives of those who don't understand Jesus." So, while I would *not give* that same that same pastoral advice he gave—and I believe it is *unwise* for a pastor to give that advice—I have to *also* apply God's Word *to me*, to *my* words, to *my* heart, and to *our* fellowship. Fellow pastor Alistair Begg is *not* accountable *to me*, or to *us*, or to the world of self-appointed Internet critics.

What *is* required of us when we are faced with a decision of how to apply Scripture to a situation which is *not directly addressed in the Bible*—it's actually quite clear.

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And by the way, the Bible does not address: What do you do if you are invited to a wedding of two people of the same sex? *There was no such thing conceived of* in that time! We have plenty in the Bible to tell us what that is, and for us to come to our own conclusions (e.g., Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:10).

But consider Romans 14:4-6. By the way, this is Paul writing in the context of: We are not talking about the Doctrine of God, the Doctrine of Christ, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Doctrine of the Scriptures, the Doctrine of Man, the Doctrine of Sin, the Doctrine of Salvation, the Doctrine of the Church, the Doctrine of Angels and Demons, the Doctrine of the Second Coming. We are talking about: How do you handle things that are *not* specifically a matter of right and wrong *doctrine*? How do you *apply* Scripture in different things like what you eat, like how you will do certain things?

Okay, he says this: "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God."

Now, I wanted to not only tell you: "By the way, *I* would have given different advice to that grandmother!" I think you knew that, okay? But I wanted to make this into a teaching opportunity for us.

So, the next application: How to "kerfuffle" properly.

Look, if "kerfuffle" is a humorous sounding word for a mostly non-humorous situation, I am going to take the liberty of *making it also into a verb*: "to kerfuffle." Make sure that gets into the next edition of the dictionary, along with "kerfuffleology."

Now, I do not want to minimize the seriousness of the definition of marriage. But, how should a Christian act when confronted with a hard choice? How should pastors and elders react in advising people—*especially* if they choose to do something *you* would not do? It is pretty clear that Pastor Begg is "fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5) that the advice he gave to that grandmother is acceptable in her situation. And by the way: He limited it to *her* situation. He *understands* God's definition of marriage, and he has *never* wavered on that. Still, he gave advice that *astounded* fellow pastors! I'm one of them! But recall that Pastor Begg said, "and people may not like this answer." Oh, *they didn't!*

So, what must be my response? How should we engage in the "kerfuffle"? In general, how does one "kerfuffle" properly? Well, let's start with: Keep reading in Romans Chapter 14. Get down to Verse 10. I submit to you: It's just as wrong to judge a brother as it is to give bad advice. Romans 14:10—"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." That is *just as bad of a sin*—probably *worse*—than one moment of misguided advice.

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And I further submit to you: It is the business of *Jesus alone* to assess and discipline every church. And by the way: He is pretty good at it! You might want to go and read what He dictated to the seven first-century churches that He addressed letters to in Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3.

But another level—and here is the most important level of application: Be ready for the *next* "kerfuffle."

I started getting questions—e-mails, texts, people in passing here and there—and I made some preliminary responses, and said, "I'm going to have to get back to you with more about that, after I think about this and work on it." And I decided, before I made any public statements about that "kerfuffle," I would make sure I was not just another guy with a computer, firing off my verbal bullets into cyberspace with my opinion on the matter. My conviction is clear, but I wanted to make this into a way for us *all* to learn how to be better in handling situations.

Any one of us could be ambushed. Let me change that: *All* of us are *likely* to be ambushed by an invitation or a demand or an expectation to do something that requires *strong* skills of discernment and "kerfuffleology." So, I decided I would conduct an unscientific survey. I carefully designed it in an unscientific way, with no advice from anybody. I wanted to see how people I know would respond; so I thought, "I'm going to ask the Heritage Bible Church elders and deacons. Oh, well, I shouldn't stop there. I'm going to ask some of our teachers. I'm going to ask some others among our church family. I'm going to throw in a friend here and there."

So, in a pretty much absolutely haphazard way, I sent out a survey to about 60 people. And the main question was: "Would you attend"—and I proposed 15 scenarios. And for each scenario, I gave them five boxes they could check:

1. I would not do this.
2. It is a sin to do this.
3. It's up to one's conscience.
4. It demonstrates love to do this.
5. I don't know.

Okay, here is what I asked:

Would you attend a wedding of a same sex couple?
...a wedding of two nonreligious unbelievers?
...a wedding of a Christian and a Non-Christian?
...a wedding of two Catholics?
...a wedding of a couple who have been living together?
...a wedding of a couple who have been living together and have children together?
...a wedding of a Hindu couple?
...a wedding of a Muslim couple?
...a wedding of a Jewish couple?

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You see, it's not all that easy to just have one answer for one question that we know how to critique some guy in Ohio for doing something we would not have done.

And *then* I said:

Would you attend a Catholic Funeral Mass?
...a Hindu funeral?
...a Muslim funeral?
...a Jewish funeral?

And I know some people who have been in this situation:

Would you attend a Roman Catholic Mass with a friend if the friend said he or she would visit *your* church the next week in return?

Or, would you attend a service led by a woman with a friend, if the friend said he or she would visit your church in return?

You see, it's *not* all that simple!

And by the way: A *lot* of these demands these days—it's not an *invitation* to do something, it's a *demand*. And there is always an "if" attached to it: "If you want to keep your job, you must"—fill in the blank.

I *loved* the responses to this! I have never been more gratified with the feedback from Heritage Bible Church than the week I did this. The most frequent responses were:

Number 1: It is up to one's conscience.
Number 2: It demonstrates love to do this. (That's the Begg position)
Number 3: I would not do this.
Number 4: It is a sin to do this.

And I was *really pleased* that the least common answer was: I don't know. Because people *thought it through*.

And, not surprisingly, the most overwhelming responses were on the same-sex wedding one: 86 percent did not say "I don't know" or "It would show love"; they said: "I would not do this" or "It is a sin to do this"—and some cheated: They checked *both* boxes, as if to say, "I would not do this *because it is a sin* to do this."

Now, what was *even more* gratifying was that more than half of the ones who responded *didn't* just check boxes. One didn't check *any* boxes, and sent me an explanation "why I can't check any boxes, because there is this and this and this and this." Okay, well, that didn't help me a whole lot with my tally. But people sent a commentary on why they answered the way they did, and they explained *why* the answers might not be the same in every situation. We have people around here who are practicing *discernment*, and they are developing *great* "kerfuffleology"! And we need to do that.

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There was a final question on there:

Would you sever fellowship with a Christian who chooses differently on such things?

I was also pleased with the response to that, because 94 percent said that they would *not* sever fellowship with a Christian who chose differently on any of those things. And all but *one* who said that they would or might sever fellowship made a distinction, and there was quite a bit of insight into this. They said: "If it was a fellow Christian who did something I disagreed with, I would not sever fellowship. But, if the *leadership of my church* did, that would be a different story." There is some insight involved.

Now, one of the people that I appreciate very much—a partner in ministry, but I didn't include him in my survey—was John MacArthur. I just decided not to send it to him. Call it some kind of discrimination against Californians. But he said some things. Here are some of the things he said:

He said: "You shouldn't judge a man by his weakest moment."

He said: "You should not celebrate someone stepping into the fury of God's judgment."

He said: "Your affection for someone is *not* the means of their salvation."

And he said: "Forty years of faithfulness is not to be defined by one unwise comment."

Now as I said, it warmed my heart to read these commentaries—and they were *pages* and *pages* of commentaries! I want to share with you the tip of the iceberg, because I think this may help you think through: What about when this comes to *your* neighborhood, *your* family, *your* job—however it might hit you.

Alright, here is one that said: "Call me crazy." "You're crazy!" Okay? Check that one—but so am I. It said: "Call me crazy, but I feel differently about funerals than I do weddings." Me, too. "Weddings are about supporting and celebrating what two living people are choosing to do in the future during their lives on Earth, and it is something that is spoken of clearly in Scripture. For *funerals*, the person they are 'about' is gone, so it is not so much of a celebration as it would be a showing of honor and respect for that person, regardless of what they believed." And I would add: And it's a Gospel opportunity.

That person and several others specified that *if* they attended a Catholic funeral, they would not participate in the Mass. I have been in that position; that is exactly what I did. I went, and I just stuck out like a sore thumb.

And by the way: Former Catholics were *very strong* in their opposition to attending *any* Catholic service *of any kind*—but they are "fully convinced in their mind."

Here's what another one says: "If we believe he"—Begg—"is in error, which I do, we should first pray for his return to the truth and consequent repentance, and also pray for

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those who have been misled. We should be thankful for the gift of discernment—and if we don't have this gift, [we should be thankful] for those who have been able to articulate with biblical authority the mistake, and give proper guidance on how to understand and interpret God's Word on this topic. Leave the work to the Holy Spirit." Bless you, I don't even remember who you were. Thank you.

Here's another one: "My actions would depend heavily on the relationship that I had with the person, and *then* I would pray on the subject before committing." And, Amen! That is exactly what Begg would say.

Here's an important one: "I look forward to your ultimate thought on this subject, and sincerely appreciate your comments thus far on Brother Alistair"—this is someone I had responded to, briefly—"whom I look forward to hanging out with occasionally in eternity."

Do you want to meet a brother in Christ that you *slaughtered* on your blog? I don't think so!

Here's another one: "This was a *great* exercise for my wife and I to work through. We talked through our thoughts for *over two hours*." I expected each person to spend about five minutes on it. "We talked through our thoughts for over two hours, and we each switched positions more than once! I feel like any time there is any possible gray area, legalism can set in, and the answer is to respond as *you are convicted*." I have a feeling that in that two hours, Romans 14 came into play.

Here's another one, a crucial one: "And then, there is Romans 14:23, at the end of that chapter, that says if it is 'not from faith,' it is a 'sin.' That, to me, means: If you do something against your conscience—not in 'faith'—then you are sinning, even though someone else doing the same thing *in* faith is *not* sinning." And I want to say, by the way: You got that verse right! That is exactly what it means, as if somebody said on the same page: "Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind."

One more: "We live in a culture that *loves* to verbally and electronically 'cancel' people. 'Cancelling' is severing relationships, refusing to interact"—the next generation has invented the word 'ghosting'—"ambushing them on social media, or just plain gossiping about them. That is *sub-Christian* behavior."

So my final point of application is: Don't "cancel" kerfufflers.

You might be one of them. A kerfuffle might swirl around you like an unexpected tornado! But, my friends, listen carefully: Christians who act like Christians "speak truth in love" (Eph. 4:15; cf. Prov. 3:3). Let your "love...abound" in "knowledge" and "discernment."

Christians who act like Christians don't waffle and change their colors, depending on who is around (Prov. 29:25). Christians who act like Christians do not set themselves up as the Interned judge and jury of people with whom they have *no connection*.

Sermon Title: Discernment And Kerfuffleology
Scripture Text: 1 John 4:1-3

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If something is a matter of right or wrong *doctrine*, and a person has published a misinterpretation of Scripture somehow, and we point out that public declaration of error, that is one way to show discernment. And we elders will be held accountable by God for watching out for you (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). That is part of the "fight" for the "faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

But shooting kerfufflers is *sub-Christian* behavior. Christians who act like Christians *do not* send anonymous critical notes. You ask *any* pastor in the world, they will tell you: That is one of the most common, most *hurtful*, deflating, discouraging things that ever happen. So I know, when I stand up on Sunday morning, there is somebody out there who says I'm *wrong*. They don't understand what I actually mean, *but I can't fix it* because they won't talk! We have *all* been through that, to one degree or another. But, Christians who act like Christians talk in person (e.g., Matt. 18:15), and they do it in love, and they do it in humility.

Again, I will mention my mentor and friend, John MacArthur. He says to seminary students now that he handles anonymous critical letters differently than he used to. Now, when he and I were close, and serving side by side every day, he read his own mail, and there was no such thing as e-mail then. And then he got to the point that he says he used to—he learned to do this—throw anonymous letters in the trash as soon as they got to his desk. But he has changed. Now, he has people who open his mail *for* him, and *they* throw them all in the trash. I still open my own mail. I still read my own e-mail. And I trash *anything* and *everything* that is negative and anonymous, because I know that comes from someone who is *not* filled with the Holy Spirit! Christians who act like Christians "speak truth in love" to one another!

Does it sound like I'm drawing a pretty strong line on that? Well, *I am*—because that is exactly what the Bible says! And I don't speak from any particular criticism that has come lately. I want you to know, though, that I, myself, sometimes send anonymous notes to other Christians. I send anonymous notes of thanks and encouragement. Now, if it is a "thank you" for a very specific person to person thing, I'll put my name on it. But I like to send anonymous encouragement because I love the idea that the person I sent it to is going to have to suspect *any number* of people of doing it—and they are going to come to church thinking, "There is somebody here that likes me! *I want to find them!*"

Do you get the point? Don't "kerfuffle" just to show off your superior knowledge! Obey God's Word. But when it comes to personal applications, be "fully convinced in your own mind," and act accordingly, in love, showing grace and compassion (see 1 Pet. 5:5). Others may choose differently, but *they have to answer to God*, not to you! And *you* have to answer to God, not to them.

Oh, and by the way: This isn't the *only* thing! Like I said: There are *multiple* things about this on the job. Someone talked to me after the first service, saying: "It's coming at my workplace! There are people there who are this and this and this and this and this, and there is more and more pressure to not only work with them—I work with them *just fine*—but to *endorse* a lifestyle, and that is being mandated."

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And there are a few other things out there! If you aren't worked up enough about Pastor Alistair, let me ask you: Is it a sin to get a Covid vaccination? You are sitting in a room with some people who I think *think it is!* You are sitting in a room with some people who I think *think it is a sin not to get a Covid vaccination!* You know what? *There is not one word in here about a Covid vaccination!* "Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind!" Do the *very best* research you can, make the best decisions you can, and stand *confidently* in Christ for His glory! Make the conversations about Him and lifting up brothers and sisters, not looking for who to shoot because they don't agree with your personal convictions!

Well, Discernment and Kerfuffleology—they are both very, very important. And may God give us grace to better and better *practice* both.

Let's pray:

Father, thank You for making it such that we are one in Christ: male and female, bond and free, Jew and Greek, all one in Christ—by the same Gospel, the same work of the same Holy Spirit, through the same Word. Oh, Father, teach us to be tenaciously resolute about the accuracy with which we understand and proclaim and teach Your Word. But give us compassion! Give us gentleness, married with our speaking truth from Your Word. And Father, kerfuffles happen all around us, all the time. Help us not to be the ones who fan the flames. Help us to be the ones who demonstrate Christlikeness in it. And we ask You this in His name. Amen.