
"A WISE MAN . . . BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON A ROCK": THE DOCTRINE OF DISCERNMENT

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Throughout the scriptures, one can find divine concern as to the manner by which we acquire knowledge, the value of knowledge in our salvation, and the importance of being able to discern truth. Solomon, for instance, prayed for an understanding heart so he could discern between good and evil.¹ Elsewhere, the Lord teaches that discernment is a fundamental spiritual gift (see 1 Corinthians 12:10; D&C 46:15–16, 23). Derived from a Latin term, *discernment* means “to distinguish, to separate, to determine”² and thus describes the means by which we become aware of and then categorize (thereby assigning a value) to a given set of knowledge. This gift is valuable in a world of appearances in which we must discern between good and evil, light and darkness. Though the term *discernment* does not appear in either one of the sermons, it is an appropriate word to describe a series of teachings found in the sermon in which we are taught how to discern between wisdom and foolishness.

While many are familiar with the set of teachings known as the Sermon on the Mount, less familiar is the similar set of teachings in

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Luke 6 known as the Sermon on the Plain. There one may find Luke's version of the Beatitudes as well as the parables of the beam and the mote, the good tree and the corrupt tree, and the wise man and the foolish man. Yet the Lucan text contains additional teachings not found in the Sermon on the Mount, such as the parable of the blind leading the blind. In each of these, the reader has the opportunity to study discernment in its truest sense: the ability to evaluate and then place value on that which is more important; a theme that runs like a golden thread throughout both sermons.

"BEHOLD, YOUR REWARD IS GREAT IN HEAVEN"

Both sermons begin with a beatitude sequence in which the Lord similarly invites his disciples to see with an eye of faith the future blessings awaiting them. Yet there are obvious differences between the passages, as the comparison below demonstrates. Luke's version includes only four beatitudes: blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are they that weep, and blessed are those who are reviled because they are believers. Luke's version also includes a series of "woe" declarations. The Lucan Beatitudes are also more grounded in earthly concerns; for example, where Matthew records, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke's version states, "Blessed are the poor."³ Similarly, Matthew's "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness" contrasts with Luke's "Blessed are ye that hunger now." Finally, the subjects of the texts also differ, Matthew's version references the audience indirectly through use of the third-person plural pronoun ("they"), while Luke's speaks directly to the audience through the inclusion of the second-person plural ("ye").

COMPARISON OF MATTHEAN AND LUCAN BEATITUDES

Matthean Beatitudes

v. 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

v. 5 Blessed are the meek:
for they shall inherit the earth.

v. 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst
after righteousness:
for they shall be filled.
(v. 4 Blessed are they that mourn:
for they shall be comforted.)

Lucan Beatitudes

v. 20 Blessed be ye poor:
for yours is the kingdom of God.

v. 21 Blessed are ye that hunger now
for ye shall be filled.
Blessed are ye that weep now:
for ye shall laugh.

COMPARISON OF MATTHEAN AND LUCAN
BEATITUDES (CONTINUED)

v. 7 Blessed are the merciful:
for they shall obtain mercy.

v. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart:
for they shall see God.

v. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers:
for they shall be called the children of God.

v. 10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for
righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.

v. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you,
and persecute you, and shall say all manner of
evil against you falsely, for my sake.

v. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is
your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they
the prophets before you.

v. 22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you,
and when they shall separate you from their
company, and shall reproach you, and cast out
your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

v. 23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy:
for, behold, your reward is great in heaven:
for in the like manner did their fathers unto the
prophets.

v. 24 But woe unto you that are rich!
for ye have received your consolation.

v. 25 Woe unto you that are full!
for ye shall hunger.
Woe unto you that laugh now!
for ye shall mourn and weep.

v. 26 Woe unto you, when all men shall speak
well of you!
for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

The principle of discernment is noticeable in the Lord's words concerning persecution. While both versions promise a blessed state to those who suffer persecution, the passage in Luke warns that the disciple will also experience physical ostracism: "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (Luke 6:22). This last beatitude also differs from the ones that precede it in that the blessed state results from the disciple's voluntary, conscious choice. Whereas one may not choose to be poor or hungry, one must choose to accept Christ and, by so choosing, become subject to the negative consequences of persecution and ostracism. But accepting Christ also leads to immediate blessings. Unlike the earlier beatitudes, this one promises a blessed state immediately and in the future: "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for

in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (v. 23). Of course, to rejoice in the face of persecution because of a promised future blessing requires one to see beyond the immediate experience; this requires discernment. Thus discernment comes into play twice in this beatitude: the first time when the disciples recognize Christ as the Son of Man, and the second time as they look forward to the blessed state promised to those who suffer persecution.

Luke 6:23 is thematically the same as Matthew, yet whereas the doctrine found in Matthew 5:12 ends the beatitude sequence, in Luke it acts as a transition between the beatitude section and the concluding woe section. Found throughout the discourses of Christ,⁴ woe statements or declarations hearken back to the woe oracles found in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, which in turn appear to have emerged from mourning rites.⁵ In this context, the cry of woe not only marked the death or tragedy of an individual, but was also used when a prophet mourned the future suffering of the unrepentant sinner. From this, some have suggested that Luke's woe section was a declaration of a cursed state and could therefore stand as a contrast to the blessed section. While the poor are blessed by receiving the kingdom of God, Luke records, "Woe unto you that are rich! for you have received your consolation" (v. 24). Similarly, woe is pronounced upon those who are full, for they will hunger, and upon those who laugh now, for they shall mourn. Finally, while those who are hated, reproached, cast out, and reviled are to be blessed with a heavenly reward, woe is pronounced upon those who are spoken well of, for "so did their fathers to the false prophets" (v. 26).⁶ This last clause ties the final woe back to the transition verse (v. 23), which had exhorted the listeners to rejoice when they faced persecution, "For in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

With this, a complex dichotomy is established between the blessed state of those who suffer persecution and the woeful state of those who attain public praise. Those who are persecuted for Christ's sake are invited to rejoice because the prophets of old received the same treatment. On the other hand, those who receive public approval will be cursed because they are like the false prophets of old. What Christ appears to emphasize through the juxtaposition of the blessed states with the woe declarations is not necessarily the need to suffer persecution or be hungry

or be poor, but the ability to discern the difference in consequences that any given act may bring. Christ asks us to look beyond our immediate circumstances and discern the ultimate consequences of our actions. In the Lucan sequence, the blessed states are not only delineated but also contrasted with their worldly woeful counterparts. This helps highlight the eternal life aspect of the Beatitudes.⁷ Christ exhorts his listeners to rejoice now, because as they discern the future happy state of the righteous, they find reason to rejoice. This reward is far greater than the transient, fleeting exhilaration of public approval.

Yet discernment is needed for more than simply choosing between immediate gratification and future fulfillment. The intellectual ability to see afar off is needed to discern between that which is true and that which only appears to be true right now—a necessary gift to avoid being deceived by false prophets. The gift of discernment allows us to see truth, which Jacob defined as “things as they really are, and . . . things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13). Likewise, the Lord defines *truth* as “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” In both cases, truth is presented as foundational and as eternal knowledge that describes the true essence of a thing. The presence of the adverb *really* in Jacob’s definition shows that truth is the way things truly are, not as they seem to be. In other words, discernment is the ability to recognize reality as opposed to outward appearances. Jacob also teaches us that the Holy Ghost teaches us truth (see Jacob 4:13). Elsewhere, we find discernment as one of the gifts of the Spirit. Regarding this particular gift of the Holy Ghost, Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Kristen M. Oaks wrote, “We are imperfect beings, but each of us can strive to be more worthy of the companionship of the Spirit, which will magnify our personal discernment and prepare us to better defend the truth, to withstand social pressures, and to make positive contributions.”⁸

“CAN THE BLIND LEAD THE BLIND?”

The theme of discernment is also found in the sections on hypocrisy. The Greek term *hypokritēs* describes someone who performed by speaking, and the word eventually became the main term for an actor.⁹ Of the fifteen references to *hypocrite* in Matthew, almost one-fourth are found in the Sermon on the Mount. We find a similar percentage in Luke, where

of the four references to the term, one is found in the Sermon on the Plain.

Christ begins by warning his listeners to avoid the public display of the hypocrite, "Do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do" (Matthew 6:2), then exhorting them not to pray in a loud voice (v. 6). Finally, in verse 16, he counsels against outwardly showing the physical difficulty of fasting. In all three cases, hypocrites are depicted as actors who put on public displays to showcase their piety. While it is unclear how common such displays actually were in Christ's day, the examples point to the hypocrites' true motives. Hypocrites who perform alms with trumpets, pray on street corners, or disfigure themselves to appear to be fasting, seek for the glory of men and thus receive their reward. In all three cases, they receive the immediate reward of social approval, but in doing so, they miss out on the greater rewards promised by the Savior.¹⁰ Thus the listener is again invited to discern between immediate and eternal rewards.

As important as the hypocrite-as-actor may be to our understanding of discernment, both Matthew's and Luke's sermons record Christ presenting a second form of hypocrisy that may have even greater personal application. This second form of hypocrisy is not the hypocrite-as-actor type but instead one who seeks to draw out the mote he has discerned in his brother's eye while either ignorantly or willingly disregarding the beam in his own eye.¹¹ The contrast between the mote and beam in terms of size is obvious, but understanding the purpose of a beam is also quite useful in realizing the full meaning behind this parable. The Greek word for beam (*dokous*) describes a large plank of wood that could be used in a roof or in the foundation of a house;¹² thus we can think of the beams in our eyes as those constructs or suppositions that affect how we "see" or understand the world around us. Though we may think of ourselves as objective, rational observers, the truth is that our subjective constructs govern how we understand our place in the world and the world itself. This second type of hypocrite lacks self-awareness or the ability to discern his or her own values and worldviews, yet still tries to remove the supposed faulty supposition (mote) from another.¹³ Ironically, if one carries this image to its conclusion, the hypocrite with the beam in his or her eye at best fails to accomplish the task of removing the mote and, at

worst, ends up harming another because the beam interferes with his or her ability to work. Therefore, even well-intentioned hypocrites end up doing harm to themselves and others.

It is this second type of hypocrite that appears to be the focus of a sequence of scripture in the Lucan sermon. The sequence begins in Luke 6:39 with the parable of the blind leading the blind: "Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?" Like the hypocrite with the beam in his or her eye who is blinded to their own weaknesses, the blind leader causes harm instead of good because he or she believes that they are capable of doing that which they are incapable of, thus leading the others to fall no matter how well intentioned his or her actions are. As with the first type of hypocrisy, discernment is required to avoid being the second type of hypocrite, yet this discernment is more subtle than simply knowing that God's reward is better than that offered by men. Whereas it is obvious as to why one should perform almsgiving without fanfare, the gift to discern what we do not want to see (in this case the beam in our own eye), much less the discernment necessary to remove the beam, is more difficult to obtain. It requires a broken heart and contrite spirit. It should be pointed out that this parable is not a condemnation of all those who lead. Indeed, elsewhere in the sermons Jesus says that leadership is expected of the disciple. Just because the blind cannot lead the blind does not mean that good leadership is not expected. Not all leaders are hypocrites but only those who lack proper authority. Thus the hypocrisy is not so much in the act itself but in the lack of discernment concerning one's own state and, to a degree, the discernment concerning the other's need as well.

Next in the sequence is verse 40: "The disciple is not above his master: but everyone that is perfect shall be as his master."¹⁴ This verse, like the pivotal verse in Luke's beatitudes, acts as the linchpin between the parable of the blind leading the blind and the hypocrite with the beam. Yet this verse also adds a principle that builds upon the other two passages and increases our overall understanding of discernment. It describes an individual who is overreaching, seeking for something he cannot obtain, in this case it is a disciple seeking to displace his master. Though this is not stated explicitly, the location of this verse in the middle of the sequence suggests that Jesus was teaching that the disciple, like the blind

guide and the hypocrite, cannot become the master because of his inability to address his own weaknesses.

Yet this verse also teaches that we can attain the same state as the Master. This mastery is achieved through discernment, which is the key to avoiding the problems presented in the parable of the blind leader and the teachings on hypocrisy. Discerning the beams in our eyes gives us the power to remove them or change them, the very process of personal development which eventually culminates in an individual who possesses the insight to lead others to safety, help in the successful extraction of the mote, and become a master rather than remaining a student.¹⁵

"BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM"

The final part of the discernment sequence, found in both Matthew and Luke, establishes the need to discern between good and evil and culminates in the declaration that those who heed the messages of the sermons are like a wise man who built his house upon a rock. Matthew begins in 7:15 with the warning, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." The image of the wolves dressed as sheep is reminiscent of the hypocrite-as-actor. But whereas the earlier types of hypocrite can be seen as merely a fool who hurts only himself or as one who is unaware of his own faults but still well-intentioned, this deception is deadly because the wolf is not acting for self-aggrandizement or from self-ignorance but with the express intent to cause harm. The wolf is deliberately acting as something else. Thus discernment becomes essential to one's very survival.¹⁶

Following this striking example, Christ introduces the parable of the good tree and the corrupt tree in Matthew 7:16: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The answer appears to be obvious—no individual, if given the choice, would ever deliberately pick bad fruit. However, Jesus has provided example after example of individuals doing just that: the Lucan Beatitudes speak of those who seek immediate reward and public acclaim instead of eternal rewards; the hypocrisy sequences in both sermons warn against becoming like those who cannot look beyond the immediate consequences and encourage the listener to discern that which is not normally apparent. Moreover, the differences between the good and bad fruit may not be apparent upon first inspection. For instance,

if the flavor is corrupt, it is not necessarily manifest in the appearance of the fruit; this is where discernment becomes necessary. Christ later taught that even the very elect will be deceived by false prophets who look like sheep or like producers of good fruit (see Matthew 24:24). This fact strengthens the unfortunate reality that many times humans do in fact choose corrupt fruit, mistaking it for something that it is not.¹⁷

Verse 18 builds upon the principles outlined in verse 17: “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” Again the listener is told that evil fruit does not come from good trees and vice versa. Yet whereas verse 17 simply states this fact, verse 18 makes it clear that not only does bad fruit not come from a good tree, it *cannot* do so. In other words, verse 18 stresses the impossibility of bad fruit emerging from the good tree.¹⁸ Christ then outlines the consequences of producing bad fruit: “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (vv. 19–20). Not surprisingly, as in the earlier sequences, Christ speaks of the consequences of being a corrupt tree, but whereas in the other examples he provides the positive and negative consequences, in this case he provides only the negative. Moreover, while the earlier negative consequences were all centered on the concept of immediate gratification, now the listener is told that the immediate consequence leads eventually to destruction, or, in other words, the immediate reward is not truly the consequence. Thus the insidious nature of the hypocrite’s desire for immediate, public approval is revealed in that it masks the later, more important consequences.

This concept is developed further in verses 21–22, as Christ reveals that “not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Though Christ describes these individuals as having performed what appear to be miracles such as prophesying, casting out devils, and many “wonderful works” all in his name, he reveals that in actuality they “work iniquity” (v. 23). These individuals combine the threat of the false prophets appearing to do that which one would expect prophets to do while in actuality doing something else altogether, and the hypocrites who are unable to see the beam in their own eyes as they seek to gain entrance into heaven by saying, “Lord, Lord, have we not [done these things] . . . in thy name?”¹⁹ As before, Christ explains the

consequences that one who falls into this category will experience: "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (v. 23). The twofold message on discernment is clear: First, we must be able to discern that which is true and that which only appears to be true but is in actuality false, just as we learned in choosing between the blessed state and the woe declarations, in the discussions of the hypocrite and the false prophet who is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Second, we must also be able to discern the need for self-awareness, as opposed to the hypocrite who cannot see the beam in his own eye. In these verses, Christ is warning his disciples not only of the deceptive nature of others but also of the self-deceptive nature of beams.²⁰

After this dual message, Christ begins his final analogy of the sermons: the contrast between the wise and the foolish man. In this analogy, the wise man is contrasted with the foolish in the building of their respective houses. The wise man builds his on a solid foundation. Luke's version describes in detail the proactive nature of the wise man as he digs deep until he finds the stone necessary for the foundation. The foolish man, on the other hand, does not dig for a foundation but instead places his house directly on the surface of the earth.²¹ As with the earlier contrast between the hypocrite and the believer, the wise man and the foolish man differ primarily in their ability to discern between the way things appear to be and the way things really are.

Yet there is also a notable difference. Whereas the hypocrisy in the earlier examples is easily evident, the building of the house either on sand or on rock has no immediately discernible effect. In fact, the distinction does not really matter on days when the weather is fair. It only becomes a problem when the weather turns and the rain saturates the ground, loosening the soil and collapsing the house. At this point, however, the contrast is evident. Because the difference between the wise man and the foolish man is not immediately apparent, building on a solid foundation, like the need to discern the false prophet who looks like a disciple, or the corrupt fruit which may appear like the good, requires knowledge of what is truth, that which *really* is. In this case, it is the knowledge that regardless of how things appear now, the house built on sand has no real foundation and will collapse with the storm.

With this analogy Christ ends the sermons, promising that “every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:26). Like the Beatitudes, where one is asked to choose the blessed states or the woes, the choice is ultimately between the way things appear to be and the way things really are. The hypocrite sequences continue this theme with actual examples of the conceptual understandings of the woes of the Lukan Beatitudes. The final sequence concerns the true discernment between that which wreaks destruction and that which promises security. Thus the need to gain discernment is woven throughout the fabric of the sermons and emerges as one of the central themes of Christ’s message.

“FOR IT SHALL BE GIVEN HIM”

Yet Christ not only reveals the need for discernment, he also provides the means to obtain it. Matthew’s sermon, in particular, provides the key. Bridging the hypocrisy sequence and the final sequence of the wise and foolish builders, Christ teaches a pattern by which one may acquire this necessary gift, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7). This verse clearly shows parallelism—not exact repetition, but a repetition that highlights a particular nuance or idea. In verse 7, all three clauses include an imperative followed by a future tense of fulfillment with each clause building on the last, revealing a process. The first act, asking, is followed by the action of seeking, and these acts then culminate in the act of knocking.

As before, and central to the exercise of discernment, Christ provides the consequences of these actions; the reception of that which one asks for, seeks, and requests by knocking. But Jesus does not tell his audience what was requested or what was given, instead the placement of the instruction between the two sequences concerned with discernment: suggests that what is given by God is the gift of discernment, the ability to evaluate truth versus error and choose accordingly. Thus in the great battle between that which is true and that which only appears to be true, the key is the revelation that is sent by God to those who seek him. Yet Christ also provides assurances that the pattern can be put into practice immediately: “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:8). The switch

to present-tense verbs here highlights that receiving discernment is not only an ideal but an actuality, that not only may answers come, but are in fact given even now, which in turn reassures the listener that Christ's words are not just uplifting theological statements but practical instructions into the acquisition of this supernal spiritual gift.

CONCLUSION

Throughout his Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain, from the beatitudes and woes, to the examples of hypocrisy, to the foolish and wise man sequence, to the means by which we gain that discernment, Christ stresses again and again the need to be able to discern between that which is immediately sought for and that which is gained through work and experience and between that which appears to be good and true and that which really is good and true. The need to teach these things to his audience is no doubt in part due to the intertestamental apostasy that Israel had been and was still experiencing. Having lost the gift of the Holy Ghost and its function to reveal truth by this apostasy, Christ's disciples needed to understand both discernment's value and worth if they were to become the individuals who carried the kingdom forward. That they learned the lesson is evidenced by the actions following Christ's ascension.

Yet this message is as important today as it was for Christ's disciples. Though the fullness of the gospel has been returned, the necessity for each individual to be able to discern for themselves truth versus error and make correct choices is as vital today as it was then, and perhaps even more so, for we have been warned that the world will only increase in confusion between that which is true and that which is not, calling evil good and good evil.²² Christ's warnings concerning false rewards, immediate fulfillment, and disguised evil suggest that the choice between being a wise or foolish individual is still one that we all must make, while Christ's solution of revelation through asking, seeking, and knocking remains just as important for his disciples today as it was for his disciples of old.

NOTES

1. 1 Kings 3:5-14; Isaiah 1:18; and Doctrine and Covenants 131:6, respectively.

2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, online version s.v. “discernment”. For the Latin root, see *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, repr. 2002), s.v. “discern.”

3. “The beatitudes in Matthew are spiritual in nature, indicating not only God’s salvation but also the behavioral and attitudinal shape of a disciple’s life. Luke’s sermon is addressed to the physical plight of humanity. . . . [He] describes the conditions of people to which God’s blessings apply. By doing so, Luke is able to include a wider audience. In Luke, Christ addresses people as they are, not as they ought to be” (Wayne Muschamp, “The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain: An Exegesis of Luke 6:17–26,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 [1993]: 59).

4. See Matthew 11:21; 18:7; 23:13–16, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:19; see also Luke 11:42–44, 46–47, 52.

5. Waldemar Janzen, “Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle,” *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 125 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 82–83.

6. “The woe is directed to the disciples. It functions as a warning. The judgment does not mean that Christians ought to beware of people who flatter them because they are in danger from those who are hiding evil intentions. It is a woe to those followers of Christ who accommodate themselves and the message of the Son of the Man to the prevailing opinions in order to gain approval. When our focus is on a good reputation, an ultimate shame awaits us” (Muschamp, “Beatitudes,” 64).

7. “Because the rich live for the present, an eternal life under God’s salvific rule cannot be theirs. . . . Ironically, the comfortably-off and secure lead the most precarious existence, according to Christ’s reckoning. Theirs is short-term gain” (Muschamp, “Beatitudes,” 61, 62).

8. Dallin H. Oaks and Kristen M. Oaks, “Learning and Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, April 2009, 24.

9. W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker say that “*hypokritēs*” is used here “mostly in the sense ‘play-actor, role-player’” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000], 1038). “The Greek word *hypokritēs* denotes a stage actor, who assumed a role and identity that were not truly his own and performed for the audience’s approval. Jesus applies the term to religious leaders who like actors were primarily concerned with their public image” (Augustine Stock, “Jesus, Hypocrites, and Herodians,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 16, no. 1 [1986]: 6).

10. David Rhoads, “The Gospel of Matthew: The Two Ways: Hypocrisy or Righteousness,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 19, no. 6 (2006): 453–78.

11. “*Hypokritēs* . . . is used by Matthew not only [as it is in Matthew 6:2–5] but also for a critic who does not criticize himself (7:5). . . . The focus is not so much on a conscious attempt to deceive as on a false perspective or sense of values which prevents the hypocrites from seeing things as God sees them; they are not so much deceivers as disastrously self-deceived” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], 236–37). There is some evidence that the mote/beam imagery was familiar to the Jewish audience since it can be noted in some Jewish rabbinical works. For these, see David Rhoads, “The Gospel of Matthew: The Two Ways: Hypocrisy or Righteousness,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 19, no. 6 (2006), 275–76.

12. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willaim B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 320: "δοκός is a plank of wood such as is used in a weight-bearing capacity in construction."

13. This understanding may be seen in the two verbs used in the verse. The first, βλέπεις ("beholdest"), is the common Greek term used to describe physical sight; κατανοεῖς ("considerest") is related to mental perception and not to physical perception (see Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 320; see also Bauer and others, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "βλέπω" [178–79] and "κατανοέω" [522]); Dan O. Via Jr. wrote, "If the hypocrite is not consciously and cynically pretending, he or she is still responsible for being unconscious of the dichotomy between self-image and reality. . . . The many imperatives in the Gospel, including the imperative to see the truth (7:5), show that people are capable of action and insight and are guilty if they have not acted and understood" ("The Gospel of Matthew: Hypocrisy as Self-Deception," in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 27 [1988]: 508–16, 512–13).

14. The perfection referred to in this verse is not the same concept as that found in Matthew 5:48. Here, the Greek term is *katērtismenos* and means well or "fully trained" (see Bauer and others, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "καταρτίζω," 526). The Matthean term is *teleios* and has the more general meaning of finished, or completed (Bauer and others, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "τέλειος," 996). With that said, a connection may be made between the two concepts in that the disciple who becomes fully trained has now completed his or her discipleship and is therefore ready to move on to the next stage of development.

15. The sequence as a whole may be seen as a conceptual chiasmus.

16. Discernment "arises largely out of an acute sensitivity to impressions—spiritual impressions, if you will—to read under the surface as it were, to detect hidden evil, and more importantly to find the good that may be concealed. The highest type of discernment is that which perceives in others and uncovers for them their better natures, the good inherent within them. It's the gift every missionary needs when he takes the gospel to the people of the world. He must make an appraisal of every personality whom he meets. He must be able to discern the hidden spark that may be lighted for truth. The gift of discernment will save him from mistakes and embarrassment, and it will never fail to inspire confidence in the one who is rightly appraised" (Stephen L Richards, in Conference Report, April 1950, 162).

17. "Satan has had great success with this gullible generation. As a consequence, he and his angels have victimized literally hosts of people. There is, however, an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost" (James E. Faust, "The Forces That Will Save Us," *Ensign*, January 2007, 8–9).

18. Though Luke's analogy of the good and bad trees is not as comprehensive as Matthew's, following the analogy, Luke ties it back to man's nature: "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). With this insight, we are taught that words that one speaks are often the direct result of inner intent.

19. "Relevant to all members of the community and not simply to its leaders, this warning fits an almost infinite number of situations in the life of the church" (Paul Minear, "False Prophecy and Hypocrisy in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Neues Testament Und Kirche: Festschrift für Rudolf Schnackenburg*, ed. by Joachim Gnilka [Freiburg: Herder, 1974], 83).

20. Paul Minear, "False Prophecy and Hypocrisy in the Gospel of Matthew," 83.

21. For more on the relationship between the two builders, see Kamal Abou-Chaar, "The Two Builders: A Study of the Parable in Luke 6:47-49," *Theological Review* 5, no. 1 (1982): 44-58.

22. "Discernment is a light of protection and direction in a world that grows increasingly dark" (David A. Bednar, "Quick to Observe," *Ensign*, December 2006, 36).