

Current Events and the Currency of Truth: “Test Everything”

Byron Barlowe opens a series on biblical discernment for dark days, likening wise discernment of current events and abiding issues to examining bills and coins to verify their authenticity. Being able to tell the difference between good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, fruitful vs. unfruitful, and subtle lies that captivate believers is a long-term discipline that is a Christian's duty and privilege to walk out as God provides Scripture, counsel, reflection, and field experience.

“In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Colossians 2:3

As Christians, should we really concern ourselves with discerning real vs. fake, better vs. best, profitable vs. unprofitable, lies and half-truths vs. truth and wisdom? To help answer that question, and as an introduction to a coming series on discernment, let's look at a historical example from over 70 years ago.

Adolph Burger, a Jewish printer sentenced to a Nazi concentration camp in 1942, was shocked to find himself released and forced to use his printing skill for Germany's war effort. In a perversion of the tabernacle artisans whom God gifted during Israel's exodus from Egypt,[\[1\]](#) Burger was forced to facilitate a brilliant secret plan to ruin Britain.

His and fellow Jewish craftsmen's work would be dropped by German bombers over English cities and towns. But these were no explosive devices. They potentially held much more devastating power than any number of bombs. They were even made of paper!

Fifty-five years later, investigative TV show *60 Minutes II* hired a deep-sea recovery team to search the 350-foot depths of Lake Toplitz in Austria. Why? In the final days of WWII, when the Russians and Allied troops were pinching Hitler's regime from opposite sides for an inevitable victory, some Nazi holdouts hoped the diabolical plan could yet be implemented. So, they sunk the work of the Jewish artisans in remote Lake Toplitz.

The plan, dubbed *Operation Bernard*, would seize upon human greed and sheer numbers to ruin the British economy. It would go like this:

- Drop exquisitely forged English pound notes from Luftwaffe planes causing widespread distribution, then refuse to honor the phony money by banks and businesses, and resultant economic panic among citizens, thus
- Radically undermining the value of the British pound, hence
- Destroying the economy, hopefully driving England to its knees and ensuring victory.
- Key to the plan: human nature. Money falling from the sky is just too tempting! It would definitely lead to hoarding and general circulation, they thought.

Most forgers do as little as they can to mimic genuine currency—only enough to get a pass on a cursory look. “But by using the world’s finest craftsmen and supplying . . . the most modern tools and machinery, the Germans solved this problem Once the bills were in circulation, it would be difficult for even experts to know genuine from counterfeit; amateurs would have no hope.”[\[2\]](#)

Judging counterfeit claims and deceit, like the bogus bills the Nazis created, is a complex project, requiring great skill and training. Much of godly discernment emerges from self-discipline, a facet of the fruit of the Spirit. According to Tim Challies, author of *The Discipline of Spiritual*

Discernment, every disciple of Jesus is morally obligated to discern between truth and lies and to pass on the former while resisting the latter.

Whatever the person's level of maturity in Christ, wisdom and its application of discernment to specific issues is available for every Christian. "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the *knowledge* of him who called us . . ." (1 Peter 1:3-4, emphasis mine). "Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten" (1 Corinthians 2:6 NLT). All born-again believers possess potential discernment. Mature ones seek and develop it.

The biblical command to "test everything" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) means carefully weighing inputs from culture, family, and even personal thoughts. It monitors—somewhat like antivirus software on a computer—our beliefs and decision-making in light of Scriptural truth, Spirit-illuminated meditation and thoughtfulness, godly counsel, and experience in situational discernment.

Gaining wisdom, the entire point of the book of Proverbs, is lifegiving and sweet! "Know also that wisdom is like honey for you: If you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 24:14).

Often this lifelong process seems burdensome, but spiritual warfare is indeed warfighting, which is often excruciating. The Body of Christ has always been in a *war of ideas*, battling for truth. However daunting, constant discipline and practice takes over and knowledge grows into wisdom which, by God's grace, produces discernment. Discernment becomes a progression not unlike basic education from kindergarten to secondary graduation. The seasoned soldier of Truth can see potential danger approaching and react with muscle memory, but not prematurely or with overkill. Better weapons in trained hands

win.{3}

Lies, subtle and blatant, emerge daily on every front like perhaps never in our history. Brazenly hostile and self-contradicting misinformation and propaganda avalanches too quickly to keep up with.

Renowned Christian philosopher Dr. J.P. Moreland insists that “the fundamental fight today is not primarily about truth claims” themselves but rather how we can know truth at all. The prevailing assumptions question the very “nature of knowledge itself.”{4} People say, “How can you know that?” or simply dismiss Christian faith statements and reasoned, Scriptural argumentation as groundless, mostly due to their faith in scientific naturalism as the only source of actual truth.{5} Postmodernism creates a widespread belief that truth can only be tribal, eschewing appeals to absolute or universal truth claims—chiefly, the metanarrative of the Biblical record.{6}

This moment in American history is witnessing pervasive efforts to deceive and shut down alternative views. Pressure groups, several with Marxist underpinnings, actively initiate strategies designed to dismantle and remake American culture, its history and education system, the nuclear family, negotiated policy creation, America’s founding principles, the role of the press, and to suppress individuals and groups who do not hew to certain views. Some big businesses, “woke” and supportive of such moves, provide financial, advertising, and distribution aid as de facto gatekeepers and worse.

Thanks to federal law granting them special protections, social media platforms and search engines (Big Tech) are uniquely free, compared to broadcast radio and TV, to blacklist and block anyone with whom they disagree. It’s a matter of public record that Google, Facebook, Twitter, and others exercise these tactics of massive influence more each week. Industry leaders who skew Leftward politically have

bound together to influence the outcome of the 2020 Presidential election.[{7}](#) Calls from members of Congress unconstitutionally imply, even threaten, to “research” individuals who were associated at all with the former president or the movement he represented. Understanding the roots of radical notions like these helps recognize and rebut them.

This seems to be our generation’s time of testing. But, as Jesus taught, believers don’t target even our human enemies.[{8}](#) Rather, “we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We fight for their sake and ours against destructive lies. During dark days, such a keen battle-ready mindset and *heartset* seems all the more urgent.

What’s Our Part in Deciphering Truth in All This Chaos?

Did you know that you can refuse a suspicious piece of currency? But if you accept it, you’re legally responsible. If it’s funny money, you’re left holding the bag.

The Bank of Canada’s solution to a rampant counterfeiting problem was a campaign drumming into the public the watchwords: “touch, tilt, look at, look through.” That publicity campaign taught citizens how to test official currency compared to forgeries. Likewise, Christ followers must hold up any claim or trend to the light to see if it’s genuine truth or a fake. On religious claims and trends, examine carefully any doctrine or teaching or you could be led astray.[{9}](#)

Therefore, if legal tender requires examination and the recipient is legally responsible for analyzing all received cash payment, then certainly Paul’s admonition to “examine everything”[{10}](#) applies even more to citizens of God’s

kingdom. We will answer for our spiritual savvy, our *saltsmanship*, and our lighting of the world, as well as how wisely we led our families, fellows and flocks.

Everyday life examples of the need for vigilant discernment are replete. Recently I was digitally fed news from an online newspaper I found valuable. After a quick search I discovered that this newspaper is owned by a mystical religious cult founded in China. I found out through reporting sources I didn't fully trust, though, so I provisionally entered that new fact into my matrix of personal filters. Only recently was that claim confirmed when I saw the name of the religious group spelled out on the publication's web site.

The point of the story: few things are jet black and snow white, so layers of discernment are required. When things get gray, more work is needed with the help of others. Wise discernment discovers distinctions within the knowledge we gain, it assesses known patterns, and advises the heart and mind on levels of trust to agree to or the need to reject.

In the case mentioned, I determined that the enemy of my enemy (the Chinese Communist Party) is my friend, in a way. However, I have an eye out on journalistic balance and am especially on guard reading their newspaper's spirituality section (if I ever read it). All of this took a grand total of less than fifteen minutes, then an abiding mindfulness as I hunted for other things. Awareness and practice are key. Biblical and cultural perception paves the way. Make your own wise assessments.

You, as a growing or seasoned Christian, can use wise discernment to serve as an "elder in the gate" for others. Or, as a seeker you can begin to plumb the depths of God's twin revelations in Creation and the Bible. The book of Proverbs emphasizes a desperate and greatly rewarding pursuit of wisdom and its seasoning with age. We are here to help equip you and answer your questions.[{11}](#)

The best antidote to spiritual and worldly confusion is simply Holy Spirit-led discernment. (And that's not just for those gifted with special discernment.)

In future posts I will address several angles on discernment in the world and Church. Following is a list of upcoming topics as I envision them today.

Upcoming in This Discernment Series

The How of Discernment—I'll dive deeper into biblically defining discernment and address how worldview as a concept helps reveal and classify untrue and dangerous assumptions among philosophies that affect one's view of the universe and the Creator, human value and business, and more. Also, to be discussed: How can we distinguish true from untrue (or the insidious half-true), good, better and best, and right from wrong or disputable matters of conscience? What is the relationship of knowledge, wisdom, and discernment as the Bible frames it?

Spiritual & Mental Triage—How can I handle sustained, varying and rapid information, claims and counterclaims, and policies that force me to either endure, protest, or free myself from them? (I may write some about conscientious objection vs. following authorities.) How can one fend off attack, especially the arrows aimed at religious freedom, biblical values and God's revealed will? What if repression or persecution happens anyway?

Distinguishing Between God's Ways and God's Enemy's Ways—It bears emphasizing that, though the cosmos (world) and human sin nature (flesh) are capable of ruin on a global scale, there's a cosmic battle pre-dating man and Creation—and, yes, politics. The traits and track records, if you will, of both God Almighty and the original Rebel help to immediately test a message's likely origin and flag the source.

Discerning and Dealing with False Dichotomies—With so many

events and “empty philosophies of men,”[{12}](#) the unified biblical narrative of how life works and biblical guidance gets distorted by oversimplified false choices—a favorite trick of the Liar and his worldly, often unwitting, disciples. It’s either “material things are all that matters” or “spiritual and mystical things are the only really real things,” etc. Competing goods are confusing for good-willed people, too. How do I better notice these and find either a middle way or a third way? What false *splits* have I bought into that keep both unbelievers and believers from discerning biblically: facts vs. feelings, truth vs. emotions, oppressors vs. the oppressed only, and so on?

Giving Essentials Their Proper Due—How do I and those I spiritually lead avoid unconsciously discounting a high view of Scripture, theology, and God? We not only need to elevate our game but lift our eyes to the heavens.

Realize and Embrace the Need for Testing—Even the scariest of crises, such as an epidemic or a cultural revolution, may constitute a test God uses for us. Such events provide a perfect laboratory for gaining discernment from general knowledge and a growing understanding gained by “rightly handling the word of truth.”[{13}](#) The disciplines you hone through a sincerely perseverant search for a divine source of wisdom gains immediate insight for daily situations, news, and cultural developments that touch your life.

Discernment and the Human Heart, Mind and Will—What did Solomon receive after asking for discernment to govern God’s people, and how does that apply to me? Did that guarantee wise living? What’s the difference between the heart and head in biblical and scientific terms? What does Scripture say about the heart and how elevated is its role?

Are You and Your Sources Asking the Hard Questions?—Yesterday’s conspiracy theory increasingly becomes today’s headline and tomorrow’s policy. Did you detect a

curious new spirit of control, perhaps a taste by governments for unreasonable and unrelenting regulations in the initial stages of the Covid-19 response? [I did in March 2020.](#) Skilled observers like Dennis Prager asked early on about the balance of our national response. Discerning people were justified in their caution and predictions about the tradeoffs between several goods: fighting a novel virus for everyone weighed against economic, medical, and psychological damage, not to mention governments' tendency to retain emergency measures beyond need. Asking the hard questions can enable us to see and respond to the shifts and movements around us from whichever side. Asking early enough can avoid hazards.

Avoiding Logical Pitfalls and Inappropriate Judgment—Thinking can be flawed or downright incorrect, so how can I avoid that? What are some common logical fallacies and how can I spot them? Are sound arguments always true?

Judging: Is it a Forbidden Act or a Necessary Tool?—One of the most famous but misused quotes of Jesus is, “Judge not, lest you be judged” (Matthew 7:1). Was He teaching never to make assessments of anyone or anything, or did His and other New Testament teachings offer a nuanced approach?

Discernment must stem foundationally from an outside Observer or its interpretations will be captive to its own small circle of knowledge, assumptions, and influencers. Think of it! God intervened in human form and keeps speaking into it by his illuminating Spirit. “But the one who is spiritual discerns all things” (1 Corinthians 2:15).

As ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors, we speak his truth as if from a foreign country.[\[14\]](#) How do we gain a hearing? Partly from making sense of things from an objective, authoritative, out-of-this-world point of view, relying on knowledge and wisdom that the unredeemed can only dream exist.

Notes

1. Exodus 36:1.
2. Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books 2007), 14. I owe this well-researched story and many concepts to Challies.
3. 2 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Timothy 4:8; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12
4. Dr. J.P. Moreland, on a Zoom conference call sponsored by Baylor University apologetics club Oso Logos (tied to Ratio Christi), streamed live on March 2, 2021. I attended that online meeting.
5. See probe.org/atheist-myths-and-scientism/. Note: this belief sneaks into the minds and convictions of Christians, too, who don't see its influence.
6. See probe.org/worldviews-part-2/ and probe.org/truth-what-it-is-and-why-we-can-know-it/.
7. See a mainstream media article detailing a "conspiracy" to "save the [2021 Presidential] election" through a "shadow campaign" led by a "cabal" of Big Tech leaders at time.com/5936036/secret-2020-election-campaign/. See also an expose (speech transcript) detailing very recent and alarming systematic message controlling methods by giant social media platforms: imprimis.hillsdale.edu/control-need-rein-big-tech/.
8. "Love your enemies . . .", Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 12:31.
9. Acts 17:11. More to come on general as well as spiritual discernment to via Probe.org, Probe radio and our [Head & Heart podcast](#).
10. 1 Thessalonians 5:21.
11. Visit our answers to visitor queries at Probe.org/answers/ and [Ask Probe](#).
12. Galatians 2:8.
13. 2 Timothy 2:15.
14. Hebrews 11:16.

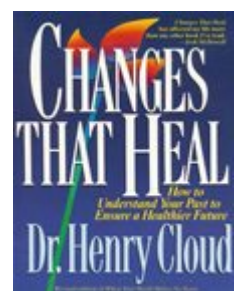
How Change Happens

On my recent trip to Australia (2010), one of the topics I was asked to address at a conference featuring a redemptive view of homosexuality was “Is Change Possible?” This is a controversial question because there are some loud, insistent voices in the culture who say, “Unless you never again have a homosexual thought or feeling, you haven’t changed. And since no one admits to that, any claim of change is an illusion.”

No one would apply that strict a standard to any other issue! Former alcoholics living sober and free from the chaos of their drinking for decades still would like a cold beer on a hot day, but that doesn’t mean they haven’t changed!

Is change possible? Change is part of life! But transformation is also part of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Understanding how change happens, on the other hand, is another matter. So I have been thinking about the process for a long time as I prepared for my message.

One of my favorite explanations comes from Dr. Henry Cloud in his book *Changes That Heal*. He gives a delightful application to one of Jesus’ parables in Luke 13.



“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year,

and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' (vv. 6-9)

Grace and truth in this parable are symbolized by the actions of "digging around" and "fertilizing." Using the trowel of God's truth, we must dig out the weeds and encumbrances of falsehood, sin and hurt that keep the soil of our souls cluttered. In addition, we must add the fertilizer of love and relationship to "enrich the soil."

As a Bible teacher, a lay counselor, and one involved in helping those deal with unwanted homosexuality, I have seen the truth of Dr. Cloud's suggestion over and over again. As we study God's word with an open heart and pursue knowledge of God and intimacy with Him in a personal relationship ("the trowel of God's truth"), change comes when we identify the lies we have believed about life, about ourselves, about other people, and about God, and replace them with the truth. Change comes when we repent of how our coping mechanisms have become sin because they keep us from trusting God. Change comes when we forgive those who hurt us so we are no longer in bondage to those who left wounds on our souls. Change comes when we live in community, engaging with the Body of Christ who can be "Jesus with skin on" to us. Change comes when people love us and accept us as we are so we can be courageous to deal with our "stuff" and cooperate with God in the changing, healing process.

Dr. Cloud continues,

But the Bible tells us that in order for grace and truth to produce fruit, we need a third key element: time.

Look again at verses 8 and 9. "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, Fine! If not, then cut it down.'" The gardener, who certainly symbolizes our Lord, the "author and perfecter" of our faith, realized

that his work and the fertilizer need time to take effect. In short, *it takes time to grow*. And time alone will not do it. *Time must be joined by grace and truth*. When we respond responsibly to these three elements, we will not only heal, but also bear fruit.

We live in a microwave culture that has trained us to have unrealistic expectations about time. We want instant everything, and we hate waiting. I received an email from a young man in his early 20s who hated his same-sex attractions and wondered how long it would take to get rid of them. I explained to him that it's not like a bad case of acne, it's far more complex than that, and that it's our experience that for people his age, three to five years of actively "digging around" in the soil of their hearts and minds produces lasting change. He thought that was too long. I wondered, "What will your life look like in three to five years if you keep going down the path you're on? Bless your heart!"

Change is normative. Change is expected. Change is hard work, but we have the assistance of our divine Gardener to make it happen.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/how-change-happens/
on Sept. 14, 2010

"What Sins Disqualify Me For Ministry?"

I'm a guy in my mid twenties and a few months ago, I resigned from my work as director of a local ministry because I just can't get over my struggle with pornography. I've been "clean"

for weeks and sometimes months, but it seems that inevitably I fall again. I really want to break this cycle of sin and live a life of sexual purity, both inwardly and outwardly. To do that I am seeking the Lord in His Word and through prayer (though not as consistently as I should). I have people that keep me accountable. I meet weekly with a few older men for a study on sexual purity. At the same time, I want to serve the Lord in anyway he wants me to serve. But there is some confusion...I have been presented with many opportunities to serve God (leading worship, camp counselor, teaching Bible study, and doing part-time youth ministry at a local church), but I don't know if I should serve in these ways since I haven't been able to break free of this sin. So my questions: Which sins disqualify me from Christian service and/or leadership? And for which roles would those sins disqualify me?

It breaks my heart to read your question (though I am SO glad you wrote!). Not because of your actual question, but because of the mentality that indeed permeates so many churches and ministries that one has to be perfect (especially in the area of sexuality) in order to serve God. We can't be perfect, so either we allow the enemy to persuade us to disqualify ourselves, or we can find ourselves immersed in an atmosphere of impossible expectations and standards that results in secret sin and resulting hypocrisy.

I prayed about my response and talked to a number of men in leadership at my church ([Watermark Community Church](#) in Dallas), where transparency, honesty and accountability are bedrock values.

First, let me affirm you in your decision to step down from ministry for the purpose of focusing on your relationship with Christ. It's also essential to listen to your accountability group to determine whether and when you are ready to resume a leadership position like the ones you list in your email.

From what you describe, it sounds like you may already have components in place for successfully achieving sexual purity, which is a process and not an event:

1) It's essential to actively pursue intimacy with Christ through prayer, the Word, and developing the habit of daily surrender and dependence on Him. Meditate on the truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 until it soaks down into your soul and you "own" it:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

(This is the part that differentiates trustful empowerment from "white-knuckling" it.)

The fact that you admit inconsistency in your time in the Word and in prayer is really key. Allow me to strongly encourage you to make these disciplines your highest priority in this time of learning to become an overcomer. Otherwise, it would be the equivalent of trying to train for a marathon without eating or drinking regularly!

2) It's also essential to build an accountability support system as you live in community with other Christ-followers. Naturally, there are different understandings of what constitutes accountability, but what works very well at Watermark is a network of people with whom we can be honest, on whom we can depend to show us grace at the same time that they speak the truth to us, and who are safe people to whom we can confess our sins immediately before getting caught in a downward spiral of secrecy and dread that allows sin to continue, unrepented, for a period of time. Even people in

leadership, when they confess immediately and ask for help, prayer and continued accountability, do not lose their jobs or, for volunteer leaders, their opportunity to serve through leading, if they are proactive in confessing and repenting to their accountability “safety net.” One of my pastors wrote, “There are times when we need to step back from leadership positions to devote all our energies to focusing on Jesus so that we can deal with the sin that sometimes entangles us. That has happened to a number of our staff who are back in leadership positions today.”

Watermark has the largest Celebrate Recovery ministry in the U.S., so some of the recovery vocabulary spills over into the rest of the church culture. We are all familiar with the phrase “struggling well,” which means actively denying our flesh’s tendencies and desires to stumble and sin, and when we do fall into sin, we immediately confess and repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord (1 John 1:9), and get back up again. And we get that struggling is just an expected part of living in a fallen world, and we all struggle against various temptations. One of the pastors I talked to in preparation to answer your email stressed that what disqualifies someone from serving in leadership is not “struggling well,” which is good, but engaging in continuing, unrepented sin—which also includes a rebellious, increasingly hard heart. That doesn’t sound like it describes you, but that’s something you and your accountability team would determine.

The CR Men’s director wrote, “His struggle with pornography sounds like it has been ongoing with consistent defeat. I am saddened that he felt the need to resign, instead of “sitting the bench” for a season. This indicates to me that he couldn’t be honest with his employer (my assumption, of course). In the future, I hope and pray that _____ will see his struggle with porn as a platform of authenticity that God can use in his life to relate to and minister to others. As he relates to and

ministers to others, he will experience freedom and fellowship like never before (1 John 1, 2 Cor. 1). He just needs the opportunity to begin sharing. I would highly recommend CR or some other Christ-centered recovery program.”

You asked for a list of disqualifying sins and “off-limits” places of service and leadership. I don’t know that such a list exists, although I do think it’s important to keep in mind Paul’s command and statement in 1 Cor 6:18–“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.” Sexual sin (defined as “illicit intercourse,” the meaning of *porneia*, translated “immorality”) is in a different category than other sins. For example, if a man or woman in church leadership has an ongoing sin problem with having sex with anyone they’re not married to, they need to direct their energies into learning chastity and purity, learning to keep their passions under control (1 Thess. 4:3-5), rather than continuing to minister to others in the name of Jesus while practicing the hypocrisy that Jesus condemned.

One of the themes that runs throughout the gospels is the importance of the heart as opposed to outward appearance. What grieved the Lord Jesus was not sinners who came to Him with a broken, contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17), but religious leaders with a hard, rebellious heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, He revealed the way God sees the sinfulness of the heart, even if it doesn’t manifest in outwardly apparent sin. So I would respectfully suggest that what disqualifies someone for a position of responsibility is a hard, rebellious heart.

This may have been more than you expected when you wrote, but I do hope you find it helpful.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Update 2018: Watermark is no longer using the Celebrate

Recovery curriculum, though we parted from the CR folks on very good terms. We have written our own program called “re:generation,” which a growing number of other churches have brought to their congregations: www.regenerationrecovery.org/.

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“Do You Have More Information on School Discipline Problems?”

In the late 1940s teachers listed the worst problems they faced in school as chewing gum, running in the hall, etc. A few years ago teachers listed some violent crimes as the worst problems. Do you have more detail on this?

One example often used to demonstrate social decline is the list of discipline problems in the public schools. Usually the list contrasts school problems 50 years ago with those today.

Supposedly the top problems in the schools 50 years ago were: talking, chewing gum, running in the halls, making noise, getting out of line, violating the dress code, and littering. According to the survey, today’s school problems are: drugs, alcohol, pregnancy, suicide, rape, and robbery.

Unfortunately, the school discipline list is an invention. The lists are not the result of research or surveys. The first list (50 years ago) catalogues daily disturbances. The second list (today) is actually composed of items from a “Safe School” questionnaire. To read more about these school discipline lists, see Barry O’Neill, “The invention of the

school discipline lists," *School Administrator*, 51 (1994): 8-11. I would NOT recommend you use these lists to demonstrate social decline.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate social and moral decline in this country would be to cite many of the statistics in Bill Bennett's book *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) or at the Empower America Web Site (www.empower.org). These show a dramatic change in social statistics from 1960 and use respected instruments of measurement.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries