

Clear Minds, Generous Hearts

By L.D. Waterman

25 August 2014

A member of the BtD network recently recommended the book *Making Judgments Without Being Judgmental: Nurturing a Clear Mind and a Generous Heart* by Terry Cooper. It's a relatively small book, but packed with profound and helpful insights.

Cooper's chart (on page 28) comparing "Healthy judgment" with "Judgmentalism" can serve as a mirror in which we examine ourselves as we interact with views and people with whom we disagree. One of the lines in that chart says: "Healthy judgment involves holding to moral and religious concepts with charity and tolerance toward those who differ. Judgmentalism clings tenaciously to moral and religious concepts with disrespect and intolerance toward those who differ." Charity vs. disrespect (1 Cor. 13; 1 Pet. 3:15): those do have a biblical ring to them, don't they?

Have you noticed how a passion for our "right" or "better" view of spiritual concepts can push even godly people to violate the spirit of Christ in defending those concepts? While we stand safely innocent of *literally* violating Jesus' command not to say "*Raca*" or even "You fool" (Matt 5:22), the scorn and disrespectful attitude Jesus intended remains too much with us. Real discussion of issues on which we strongly disagree serves as an ongoing test of our sanctification. Will we avoid the interaction entirely, because we so deeply disrespect our "adversaries"? Or will we submit to the "iron sharpening iron," not only of our concepts but of our hearts and attitudes?

Cooper's chart (on page 38) comparing "Critical thinking" with "Thinking critically" also presents useful insights for our discussions of important issues of difference. Here are two samples:

- "Critical thinking praises and affirms as well as corrects and critiques. Thinking critically looks for things to condemn and dismiss."
- "Critical thinking attempts scrupulously to be fair in its representation of ideas with which one disagrees. Thinking critically creates caricatures, sweeping generalization and straw men."

It can be useful to step back and listen to ourselves: when I disagree with someone, do I look for things to praise and affirm as well as correct and critique? Or am I only condemning and dismissing? And perhaps the second question is even more challenging: do I attempt to be scrupulously fair in my representation of ideas with which I disagree? Or do I fall into the temptation of making sweeping generalizations? Do I give descriptions of ideas or practices with which the supposed proponents of those would not agree? Without honest dialogue and feedback, we all too easily describe someone else's view from our own frame of reference, resulting in a caricature or a straw man.

As we strive to discern truth from error and wise ideas from unwise, may the Lord help us to nurture clear minds and generous hearts. Surely this is the path of the Lord, who calls us not only

to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) but also to “be completely humble and gentle” (Eph. 4:2). Thanks to Terry Cooper for pointing us in that direction.