

DISCERNMENT

“Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”Romans 14:13

“One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you – by night they are coming to kill you.” Nehemiah 6:10

Well, what a bunch of bullies! Nehemiah responded to enemy aggression in his usual stalwart fashion, determined to trust God and not allow anything or anyone to deflect him from his God given assignment. *“Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” I realised that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.” Nehemiah 6:11-13*

Nehemiah correctly *discerned* the plan of his enemy and refused to run away. Discernment is a wonderful gift and operates in grace and faith. Discernment enables us to flow in agreement with God’s governmental authority and wise counsel. We do not need to strive to attain discernment because it is a spiritual gift. *(1 Corinthians 12:1-12)*

Discernment - acceptance

Godly discernment enables us to make decisions based on God’s truth and not on our own opinion. I firmly believe that discernment is about agreeing with the heart of God on a matter.

Suspicion – condemnation

- Suspicion and condemnation have no part in discernment, because they are rooted in opinion, falsehood (lies), mistrust, rejection and fear.
- When operating in discernment it is important to make a decision not to withdraw but to follow the witness in one’s heart by the Holy Spirit.
- Discernment is not about what we think we know or based on our own opinion, perception, potential falsehood/lies, mistrust or rejection.

The gift operates by faith – don’t use your imagination.

- Faith operates through Grace
- Go with the conviction (witness) in your heart
- You don’t need to strive in your gift.

***“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” Romans 14:5
“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean of itself.” Ro 14:14***

Although the context of this teaching is in regard to whether food ought to be considered to be ritually clean or unclean, we may gather some principles from discernment from Apostle Paul in our desire to understand discernment:

- Paul was confident in the Lord. He had made up his mind, as a person who “*is in the Lord Jesus.*” It was his relationship with Christ that enabled to make Godly decisions and offer Godly counsel on this matter.
- Each of us must be “fully convinced” in our own spirit of what God is saying on a matter.
- We need to make a decision not to withdraw from people; discernment often uncovers issues that the Lord would wish to heal/deal with and we need His compassion, wisdom, mercy and courage to press in and encourage others into a place of freedom in Christ.

The Bible teaches in relation to discernment that:

IT IS NECESSARY TO DISCERN

“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19

DISCERNMENT IS A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

“Distinguishing between spirits” 1 Corinthians 12:10

God has given discernment to the body of Christ as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

OPERATING IN INTEGRITY

DISCERNMENT AND HUMILITY MUST GO HAND IN HAND

“Knowledge puffs us up” 1 Corinthians 8:1-3

LOVE BUILDS US UP

“The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know what he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.”

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” 1 Corinthians 8:9

- We must be careful not to harm others as we discern
- Love must be our motivation or it will be false discernment. Our motivation will reveal if our discernment is counterfeit or genuine.

FEAR IS A STUMBLING BLOCK

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18

- Fear is the counterfeit of love and faith.

- A person under fear is unable to operate in a high degree of love.
- Fear creates an image of Satan that is bigger than God.

DISCERNMENT FOR LIFESTYLE

“Be imitators of God” Ephesians 5:1,2

- Discernment is about hearing God’s voice in a situation and responding with humility, love and obedience. We are called to live a lifestyle of love, of which discernment is a part.

APPLICATION OF DISCERNMENT

The Scriptures also help us to comprehend and apply discernment in our lives:

DISCERNMENT OF DOCTRINE

*“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, **and blown here and there by every wind** of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” Ephesians 4:14*

- Discernment and maturity go hand in hand.

TO LACK DISCERNMENT IS TO LACK JUDGEMENT

- The bible teaches that young children lack discernment. (*Deuteronomy 1:39*) In the same way younger, less mature Christians may also lack discernment but as one matures as a Christian, so also will the gift of discernment mature in the believer. (See also *Proverbs 6:32, 7:7; 9:4, 10:21, 12:11, 18:1-2, 24:30-34*)
- The five fold ministry offices (apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher and pastor *Ephesians 4:11*) as well as the local church government (including elders) will be able to assist in discernment of doctrine as to whether it is from God or not.

DISCERNMENT FOR LIFESTYLE/DECISION MAKING (PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY)

- Develop your own gift of discernment – it is wise to take counsel from leaders, but don’t let this prevent you from personal development of discernment.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you differentiate between your mind, your will, and your emotions and ask Him to help you to learn to recognise His voice in the area of discernment.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any areas of sin, or deception in your life, so that you may yield totally to the Spirit of God and His truth and grace.

DISCERNMENT FOR TESTING DREAMS/PROPHECIES/PROPHETS/TEACHING

The gift of discernment helps us to prophetically discern the times, our dreams and our visions and also whether a prophet has been sent from the Lord. Prophetic discernment enables us to discern false theology, prophecy/prophets, as we see from Nehemiah’s response to the prophecies given to him at the house of Shemaiah (See also *Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 18:21-22; 1 Corinthians 14:29*)

DISCERNMENT AND PROPHECY

“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

- Discernment is necessary to understand whether a prophetic word or teaching is from the Lord or not.

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

- *1 Corinthians 12:10* reveals that discernment is a gift from the Holy Spirit to serve the church in the area of discerning counterfeit spirits from the Spirit of Truth; the manifestation of truth is for the good of the whole body.

DISCERNMENT AND ANTICHRIST (FALSE SPIRITS) 1 John 4:1-6

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ...” 1 John 4:1a

- Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and enables us to discern the spirit of antichrist and other false spirits.

**LOVE MUST BE THE MOTIVATION OR IT WILL BE FALSE DISCERNMENT
COUNTERFEIT – MOTIVATION WILL REVEAL IF COUNTERFEIT OR GENUINE
DIVINATION = COUNTERFEIT**

DISCERNING THE COUNTERFEIT

Two Old Testament examples which relate to discernment of counterfeit spirits include:

1. When Micaiah discerns a lying spirit is responsible for false prophecy (*1 Kings 22:19-23*)
2. Jeremiah knows the false prophet’s message is not from God (*Jeremiah 23:9-40*)
“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD,” and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”Jeremiah 23:29

NEW TESTAMENT DISCERNING COUNTERFEIT

1. Peter discerns that Ananias’ has lied to the Holy Spirit. (*Acts 5:3*)
2. Peter discerns that Simon the Sorcerer is full of bitterness and is captive to sin (*Acts 8:23*).
3. Paul discerns the demonic source behind the slave girl’s ability to tell people’s fortunes and he commands the evil spirit to leave her (*Acts 16:18*)

DISCERNING CHRIST : Evil spirits are able to discern the Person of Christ and the work of Christ.

Evil spirit and Jesus

“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:23-24

The Demoniac

“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man.” Luke 8:26, 28,29

Slave girl to Paul

“This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most high God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” Acts 16:17

Some Jews who were not true believers

“One day the evil spirit answered then, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul but who are you?” Acts 19:15

These Jews were not true believers and the evil spirit was able to discern this. **Discernment and authority are joined in the supremacy of Christ.** The evil spirit attacked the seven sons of Sceva because the name of Jesus was only spoken on their lips without being fully written on their hearts. **We can only operate in Christ’s authority if our lives are totally surrendered to Him. Then His delivering power works miracles.**

LEADERSHIP AND DISCERNMENT

LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT

Godly discernment is essential for leaders in order that they can

- make decisions,
- give direction
- develop/implement/consolidate strategy, vision, plans
- develop teams, inspire, council and discipline.

Some Examples from Scripture

- Battle strategy given to **Gideon** (*Judges 7*) and **Jehoshaphat** (*2 Chronicles 20*);
- Survival strategy given to **Joseph** for the whole nation during abundance/famine (*Genesis 41*);
- King **Jehoshaphat’s** discernment of the four hundred lying prophets. (*1 Kings 22*)
- **King David’s** discernment of Joab’s ruse (*2 Samuel 14:18-20*)
- The **apostles/elders** meeting of the council of Jerusalem (*Acts 15*).

“May the word of my Lord the king bring me rest, for my Lord, the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the Lord your God be with you.” 2 Samue; 14:17

DISCERNMENT IS ABOUT SEEKING COUNCIL FROM GOD

RULING/GOVERNMENT

- **Discernment and Wisdom operate side by side.** We see evidence of this in the life of **Joseph** as it is acknowledged publicly by Pharaoh just prior to Joseph being put in charge of the whole land, *“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph,*

*“Since God has made all this known to you, **there is no one so discerning and wise as you.** You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.” Genesis 41:39-40 (See also Acts 7:10)*

LIFE AND DEATH SITUATIONS

- **Joseph** was sent by God ahead of the famine to preserve life (*Genesis 45:7*);
- **Solomon** was given wisdom during a dream and immediately upon waking was asked to make a ruling over a situation to discern the true mother and spare the life of her child (*1 Kings 3*)
- **Nehemiah** saw through the plot against his life and his Kingdom commission (*Nehemiah 6:12-13*).

EXERCISING JUDGEMENT IN KINGLY RULE

- Solomon asked for wisdom and God said, *“I will give you a wise and discerning heart” 1 Kings 3:12*

STRATEGISING/INTERCESSION

- Discernment helps us to “spy out the land” as we make prayer reconnaissance trips and enables us to lay hold of a corporate prayer strategy for any given situation.

HOW DO WE DISCERN?

- We cannot discern without the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth and enables us to understand spiritual truths in spiritual words (*John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:13*).
- We learn discernment through God’s word (*Hebrews 4:12-13; Psalm 19:7*);
- We discern through the renewing of our minds (*Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 2:14-16*)
- We operate in discernment through relationship with Christ.
- We can ask the Lord for knowledge and good judgement (*Psalms 119:66*)
- We are given discernment as a gift from our heavenly Father.

JESUS’ DISCERNMENT IS PERFECT

- Jesus has perfect discernment of right and wrong. What a wonderful reflection of the Father’s heart!
- Jesus operates in discernment with wisdom and compassion – Samaritan woman (*John 4*)
- Jesus discerns the thoughts of the teachers of the law (*John 2:25*)
- Jesus accurately discerns the motivation of those in the temple courts (*John 8*);
- Jesus discerns when Simon Peter speaks by the Spirit of God and also when Peter’s words are later influenced by Satan (*Matthew 16:verse 17, 23*);

- Jesus discerns the true motive of his questions (taxes to Caesar) *Matthew 22:18*;
- Jesus discerns the heart of Nathaniel, *“Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.” (John 1:47)*

SUMMARY

The bible teaches us that to lack discernment is to lack sound judgement (*Proverbs 6:32, 7:7; 9:4, 10:21, 12:11, 18:1-2, 24:30-34*)

DISCERNMENT IS SOUND JUDGEMENT WHICH ENABLES US TO

- Understand the times and significance of world events and events in our own lives
- See beyond outward facades/appearance to the heart of the matter/a person
- Distinguish between what is good and what is evil
- Recognise God’s ways, his deeds and actions for his people
- Comprehend spiritual realities and spiritual truths
- Establish God’s righteous government on the earth, affirming Jesus’ legal right to reign and rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords
- Avoid the schemes of the enemy, and therefore life’s pitfalls
- Make wise and Godly decisions on personal and corporate levels.

Godly discernment hits the mark every time! It is about seeking council from God.

The discernment of Jesus is totally trustworthy and a source of infinite wisdom upon which we can fully depend for any and all of our life situations.

Discernment is part of the process of transformation of maturity in every believer as our minds are renewed.

*“Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.**” Romans 12:2*

DISCERNMENT IS NOT:

- Instinct
- Intuition,
- Sixth sense,
- Imagination,
- A good guess
- Or a game of hit and miss

DON’T CONFUSE DISCERNMENT WITH COMMON SENSE

Don’t be daft – be discerning!”

Catherine Brown

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