The Discipline of Discernment

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Hebrews 5:11-14

Introduction: All Christian, no matter how old we are, what our experiences have been, or what our struggles are, are in need of spiritual discernment. But we do not come to have discernment without diligence, trust, and discipline in the Lord. We sometimes look back at our decisions and regretfully cry out, “What was I thinking?” This morning we are going to consider our need for discernment, what it is, and how we can develop it in our lives.

1. **What is Discernment?**
   1. Defined: “To have the capacity to perceive clearly and to understand the real nature of something.’[[1]](#footnote-1)
      1. Not simply the way we want it to be, the way that is most convenient, the way that fits with what we desire to think, but the way that it really is!
   2. The wisdom of discernment:
      1. The wisdom to consider why issues have arisen – “What caused this to happen?”
      2. The foresight to consider the results of a particular course of behavior – “What is its fruit?”
2. **Hindrances to Spiritual Discernment:**
   1. Spiritually Lethargic: “Dull (sluggish) of hearing” (5:11)
   2. Wasting time: “…by this time you ought to be teachers” (5:12)
   3. Dying rather than growing: “You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God and you have come to have need milk and not solid food” (5:12).
      1. He is not simply saying you are only on the milk, he is saying that they had lost their grip on even the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ (5:12-14; 6:1-2).
   4. Abandoning the very foundational teachings about Christ (5:12).
   5. Living in the spiritual instability, which leads to vulnerability (Eph. 4:12-16).
   6. Living without discernment leads to pain, regret, and spiritual destruction!
3. **Keys to Developing Spiritual Discernment:**
   1. Devoted to spiritual growth (5:12)
      1. Desire to grow so as to help others (Phil. 2:1-5)
      2. Desire to grow in order to know Jesus better everyday (Eph. 4:15; 2 Pet. 3:18)
      3. Fervently pray and worship (Psa. 122:1; Heb. 10:25)
      4. Feed on God’s word (1 Pet. 2:2)
   2. Familiar with God’s word (5:13)
      1. The Hebrew writer is emphasizing that those who have no experience, engagement, and interaction with God’s word will not grow in the Lord.
      2. They are “ever learning and never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).
      3. We must feed on God’s word in order to be spiritually nourished up in the words of faith and healthy teaching (1 Tim. 4:6).
   3. Recognize signs of spiritual maturity
      1. “Solid food” (5:14) – to digest such teaching requires diligence, time, and devotion.
      2. “Practice,” “exercise,” or “constant use” of “their senses.” Some Christians resemble a person who says they plan on running in the Olympics without ever training or exercising.
      3. “Trained themselves to discern good and evil”
         1. The biblical term “train” comes from the Gk. word gymnazo, which of course refers to “exercise” and “discipline” (1 Tim. 4:7; 1 Cor. 9:24-27).
         2. The more we use our spiritual senses to apply God’s word to a variety of questions, subjects, and issues that arise the easier it will be for us to discern between good and evil.
         3. But the less we do so, the more challenging it will be!
         4. This is why those who do not have discernment frequently cannot hear or understand what those who are more mature see!
         5. When you have seen a situation play out dozens of time you can see more clearly.
4. **Why must we train ourselves to discern good and evil?**
   1. God alone offers the absolute standard of what is good vs. what is evil (Isa. 5:20; Jer. 10:23; Pro. 1:7).
   2. Evil frequently masquerades as good (2 Cor. 2:11; 11:13-15).
   3. Good is often vilified by those who are ungodly or deceived (2 Tim. 3:10-13)
   4. If we do not discipline our emotions with godly discernment they can become a deluding and powerful influence for error (2 Thess. 2:10-12; Matt. 16:21-23).
   5. Spiritual maturity comes through the spiritual senses; not the physical senses.
      1. Discernment must remain disciplined and grounded in times of disorientation, chaos, and crisis (2 Tim. 1:7-8).
   6. Challenging subjects/issues require mature hearers
      1. Full truth about Christ in the immediate context of Hebrews.
      2. Moral choices: young people, parents, etc.
      3. Decisions regarding doctrinal issues: logical fallacy of appealing to emotion (2 Tim. 1:13-14).
      4. Relationship challenges (Eph. 5:22-6:4).
   7. Discernment leads us to glorify and praise God through Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:9-11)
      1. The love of God is expressed with discernment (1:9)
      2. Leads us to approve of the things that are excellent (1:10)
      3. Ensures sincerity until the day of Christ (1:10)
      4. Fills us with the fruit of righteousness (1:11)
5. **What Are Questions That Discerning Believers Will Ask In Every Situation?**
   1. God’s word and will
   2. Do I have all the information?
      1. Do I know both sides of a story?
      2. Am I willing to consider all the information in the situation?
      3. Or am I refusing to talk with those who have a different perspective than I do?
   3. Is this going to be productive in my relationship with Christ and with my brethren?
   4. Is this going to enable me to share the gospel with the lost?
   5. Is this going to help or hinder my fruitfulness in the family of God?
   6. Is this action going to hurt those who are encouraging me to serve the Lord?
      1. Shepherds who are caring for my soul (Heb. 13:17)
      2. Parents who are thinking about me and praying for me everyday (Eph. 6:4)
      3. Brethren who love me fervently (1 Pet. 1:22)

Conclusion: The diligence and discipline of godly discernment is a choice!

1. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](https://ref.ly/logosres/louwnida?ref=LouwNida.32.28&off=60&ctx=%CE%B9%CC%93%CF%83%CE%B8%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B7%CC%81%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BD%2c+%CE%BF%CF%85+n:+~to+have+the+capacity) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 383). New York: United Bible Societies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)