

## God's Word – and Spiritual Discernment (#11)

Text : **Hebrews 5: 11 - 6: 12**

### **INTRODUCTION :**

#### **A. By our last lesson we learned :**

1. Spiritual maturity doesn't just happen with the passing of time.
  - a. Even physical maturity requires effort over time.
    - 1) Proper nutrition
    - 2) Exercise
    - 3) Rest
  - b. Mental maturity requires effort over time.
    - 1) Study
    - 2) Observation and contemplation
    - 3) Application and experimentation ( *One must try new things.* )
  - c. Spiritual maturity also requires time and effort.
    - 1) One must acquire knowledge about spiritual things.
    - 2) He must then meditate upon them and respond in faith. ( *Be receptive & believe* )
    - 3) His faith must change both his mind and his actions.
    - 4) Having changed his value system, he will seek a relationship with God.
2. Spiritual maturity does not survive without continued maintenance and growth.
  - a. Spiritual people can become dull of hearing. ( **Vs. 11-12** ), even fall away. **Gal. 6:1**  
\* *When a weightlifter stop working out, he becomes fat and grows weak.*
  - b. Spirituality is not to be confused with bible knowledge.
    - 1) Atheists learn the bible to refute it.
    - 2) Scholars learn the bible to teach and debate it.
    - 3) Unloving Christians learn it to judge others and lift up themselves.
  - c. Hungering for growth is the most important ingredient in spiritual growth.
    - 1) Ingest the word.
    - 2) Digest the word.
    - 3) Do your best to live the word.

- \* **The Christians never gets to the point he can retire or even rest.  
We must never stop striving to become more like Jesus.**

**I Cor. 10: 12-** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

3. Spiritual maturity produces an observable effect in one's life.
  - a. The immature Christian wants “ear candy.”
    - 1) **2 Tim. 4: 3-4** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.
    - 2) *“Preach something that will make me feel good.”*
    - 3) The **mature** Christian wants meat to help them grow.
  - b. The goal of the immature is to be happy ... to achieve and to have what he wants.  
-- The focus of the **mature** Christian's life is outward and upward. ( **Eph 4, Heb 10** )
  - c. The immature are easily lead astray.
    - 1) **Eph. 4: 13-** ... Tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
    - 2) Babies will swallow anything.
    - 3) Babies require care and feeding, but the mature become caregivers.
- \* **Vs. 11... Spiritual maturity produces teaching .. sharing of the gospel.**  
**“As you go into all the world ...” Mark 16:15**

**B. This lesson will continue focusing on maturity, but only one aspect of it.**

1. We will discuss the concept of spiritual discernment.
2. As philosophers ask, “Which came first, the chicken or the eggs?”  
Theologians ask, which comes first spiritual maturity or spiritual discernment ?
  - a. Both maturity and discernment are essential to each other. ( *like body & soul* )
  - b. Some maturity is required to produce discernment.
  - c. Without discernment maturity is greatly limited.

**C. By this lesson we will observe three things about discernment:**

1. What is discernment ?
2. Why it is imperative that a Christian develop discernment ?
3. What are some ways to develop discernment ?

## I. What is spiritual discernment ?

### A. Dictionary definitions :

1. Discernment is : The act or process of exhibiting keen insight and good judgment
2. The quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure
3. Spiritual Discernment is : A term used in Christian tradition to describe the process of discerning God's will for one's life.

### B. Illustrated :

1. A man asked a farmer why the cow he was leading had no horns. The farmer explained, some kinds of cows are born with no horns, others have them removed while they are still calves and a few have them broken while butting other cows. On the other hand, this cow has no horns because it is a pony.
  - a. **Discernment** is having the ability to tell the difference between a cow and a pony.
  - b. It requires a certain amount of knowledge and the sense to apply it.
2. Jesus illustrated discernment by referring to man's observations from the sky.
  - a. **Matt. 16: 1-3** The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot *discern* the signs of the times?"
  - b. Mariners still use that old adage today. ( *Red at night sailor's delight ...* )

## II. Why is it imperative that a Christian develop spiritual discernment ?

A. Jesus explained that one is foolish who does not develop it. **Matt. 16: 1-3**

B. We need discernment because we must be alert for and aware of Satan's traps.

1. Satan never stops seeking to destroy the faith of Christians.
 

**I Pet. 5.8-** Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
2. Satan uses one's own emotions against him.
  - a. **James 1: 14-** But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desires.
  - b. **I John 2: 16-** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. (ESV)

3. Some brethren become ensnared by Satan and don't realize it.

**II Tim. 2: 24-26** The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses *and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

**C. Spiritual discernment is essential because there are many false teachers today.**

1. **I John 4: 1-** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world ( *Why the Bereans were called noble. - Acts 17: 11* )
2. Peter echoed John's warning. ... **II Pet. 2: 1**
3. Paul gave the same warning to the elders at Ephesus. ... **Acts 20: 28-30**
  - a. **II Tim. 4: 1-4** ... Threats from weak brethren
  - b. **II Tim. 3: 13-17** ... Threats from evil men and imposters
  - c. **II Cor. 11: 12-15** ... Threats from agents of Satan

**D. Spiritual discernment because worldly social pressure is greater than ever.**

1. We live in a time when all of the pleasures of the world are aggressively marketed.
  - a. Radio, Movies, TV ... ( Hellelevision , The Babylonian Box ) *advocates pop culture*
  - b. Computers, I-phones , etc. ( *Satan stays on top of the latest technology.* )
2. Evil is aggressively marketed as the normal. ( **political correctness** )
  - a. **Isa. 5:20-** Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;  
Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness;  
Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
  - b. Those who uphold godly moral values are now condemned. ( *homophobic, etc.* )
3. A Christian must have a must carefully discern everything.  
**I Thes. 5: 21-22** But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; <sup>22</sup> abstain from every form of evil. ( Cf.- **Acts 17: 11** )

**E. As Paul warned, the wolves are also in amongst the flock. ( Acts 20: 28-31 )**

1. When the majority of the brethren in a congregation are immature :
  - a. The congregation tends to have the same problems as immature Christians.
  - b. The congregation chooses immature leaders who will follow rather than lead.
2. When the leadership is immature :
  - a. The cling to the traditions for fear a change might have to be justified by the word.
  - b. Lack of discernment makes them uncomfortable to make decisions about doctrine.
  - c. When in doubt they just forbid because they lack the confidence of discernment.

### III. What are some ways to develop spiritual discernment ?

#### A. Set it as your goal to become spiritually discerning and pray.

1. **Read ... Proverbs 2: 1-10 - Cf. - James 1: 5-8 - Cf. - Matt. 7: 7-8**
2. Discernment does not automatically come ; it must be developed.
3. It takes time and effort. ( *You need a plan and discipline to implement it.* )

#### B. Learn what the word of God says.

1. One cannot learn every error that Satan invents.
  - a. Errors are like viruses : they multiply quickly, spread easily, and mutate frequently.
  - b. Learn the truth well and you will recognize anything that's different.
2. Be disciplined in your reading and in your studying.
  - a. Reading through the bible can be accomplished more readily than you think.
  - b. *The average reading speed for an adult is 250 to 350 words per minute. Fifth graders are required to read 150 words per minute. ( college 500 to 700 ) If you read at 130 words per minute you can read the bible in 20 min. daily.*
  - c. The more you read, the greater your familiarity with the text, **i.e., discernment.**

\* **Familiarization enables one to sense when something is wrong.** ( **ill- cooks** )
3. The bible tells us : ( **II Tim. 3: 16-17** )
  - a. What to believe ... **Teaching**
  - b. What not to believe ... **Reproof** ( confront )
  - c. What to do ... **Training in righteousness**
  - d. What not to do ... **Correction**

#### C. Based on your biblical knowledge, establish a set of unshakable core values, e.g. :

1. There is one God who created all and rules over all.
2. Jesus is the Christ the Son of the only true and living God.
3. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, rose again and ascended.
4. Salvation is from sin and only by grace through faith in Jesus as the Christ.
5. Those who remain faithful until death will live with God and Jesus in Heaven.

#### D. Practice, practice, practice

1. **Heb. 5: 14-** **But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. ( *Think about application* )**
2. Any skill takes training and practice to develop. ( *Remember learning to drive.* )

3. Just like driving, learning to filter life through discernment feels awkward at first.
  - a. As it becomes part of our worldview, we do it without thinking.
  - b. Before we learned to do it, we would go days without thinking about how God viewed the things we said, we did or we thought.

### CONCLUSION :

#### A. God, the sovereign ruler of the universe has a will for us and a standard for us.

1. Everything we do, say, or think is either within His will or out of His will.
2. Everything either conforms to His standard or it does not.
3. We do not serve a gray ambivalent God.
4. Our God has revealed Himself, His will, and His standard to us in the bible.

#### B. We must not let the world convince us that we live amid shades of gray.

1. Only those without discernment see the world in gray.
  - a. Jesus said, “**Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.**”
  - b. The evil Pilate, “**What is truth ?**” **John 18: 38**
  - c. Jesus had earlier taught us, *It is only the truth that sets men free. ... John 8: 32*
  - d. He later defined truth as being the word of God. ... **John 17: 17**
2. Discernment clarifies one's spiritual world view.

**\* We knew what our parents would think about something . God is spiritual father**

#### C. The truth of God's word and discernment are eternally linked.

1. It is in becoming conversant with the words of God that one comes to know God.
2. It is in knowing God that one comes to recognize that which He would find offensive.
3. This is spiritual discernment.

#### D. For each of us, I echo the prayer that Paul prayed for the brethren at Philippi.

**Phil. 1: 9-11** **And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; <sup>11</sup> having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

### INVITATION :

**It does take discernment to know God will for all who are outside Christ.**

**I Tim. 2: 3-4** **This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**