

The Gift of Discernment

Part 4: The Mind of Christ series

Key Scripture

"But the natural, nonspiritual man does not accept or welcome or admit into his heart the gifts and teachings and revelations of the Spirit of God, for they are folly (meaningless nonsense) to him; and he is incapable of knowing them [of progressively recognizing, understanding, and becoming better acquainted with them] because they are spiritually discerned and estimated and appreciated. But the spiritual man tries all things [he examines, investigates, inquires into, questions, and discerns all things], yet is himself to be put on trial and judged by no one [he can read the meaning of everything, but no one can properly discern or appraise or get an insight into him]. For who has known or understood the mind (the counsels and purposes) of the Lord so as to guide and instruct Him and give Him knowledge? But we have the mind of Christ (the Messiah) and do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart."

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 (AMP)

Portion for the Journey:

In his book, "The Disciplines of Life," V. Raymond Edman¹ devoted a chapter to believer's dire need for the discipline of spiritual discernment. He writes, "To see life deeply, 'as with open eyes,' is the poet's profound and piercing prayer. None of us is free from life's emergencies or exigencies²; but we should face them with spiritual insight and uplift. In order to view them with steady eye and untroubled heart we must know whether their source is in the mind of the Almighty or in the machination of Abaddon, the destroying spirit of darkness." He goes on to list examples that we can all relate to in our lives:

- Do our circumstances constitute the cross we are to bear daily (Luke 9:23), or a curse from the enemy of man's soul (Luke 13:16)
- A buffet from an allowed thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7) or a thrust from a fiery dart of the wicked one (Eph. 6:16)
- A means for searching out our hearts (Rom. 8:27), or a sifting of us by Satan (Luke 22:31)
- A trial of our faith (1 Pet. 1:7) or a temporary triumph by the father of lies (Matt. 13:19; John 8:44)
- Do our troubled feelings mean the conviction of God's gracious Spirit because of our sin (Ps. 32:4), or the condemnation of the implacable accuser of God's people (Rev. 12:10, 1 Tim. 3:6)
- Is this closed door in our pathway caused by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6,7) or is it a hindrance by Satan (1 Thes. 2:18)
- Is the apparently open door the plan of the LORD (1 Cor. 16:9; Rev. 3:8); or of a lying spirit (1 Kings 22:6,22)
- Is our help indeed from angels, sent as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14, or from the false angel of light who would lead us into darkness (2 Cor. 11:14)?
- Are we to go onward, strong in the LORD (Eph. 6:10), or to beware of the snare of the fowler (Ps. 91:3; 2 Tim. 2:26)?

¹ "The Disciplines of Life" by V.Raymond Edman, World Wide Publications, 1948

²"Exigencies" defined as an urgent need or pressing necessity, distress, any case which demands immediate action, supply or remedy. Pressing business that requires immediate help. Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language.

- Are we to resign ourselves to what appears to be God's will, or to resist what is in reality the design of the devil (both thoughts are contained in the same verse, James 4:7)?

As we ponder these examples, becomes very apparent that we desperately need this "gift of discernment" God has provided for us because apart from His Spirit we have no ability to recognize the real from the counterfeit. We have an adversary who from the beginning was determined to steer us in the wrong direction. The good news is that the LORD has given us everything we need to have the "mind of Christ" through His Word and His Spirit.

- **What is discernment?**

When Adam and Eve fell, they forfeited their freedom of living without the need to discern good and evil. Their lives were filled with innocence and God protected them from all evil. The fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was forbidden. It is very significant that Satan chose this one thing forbidden by which to tempt Eve to sin. To this day Satan tempts those whom God created to eat of this fruit apart from God. This knowledge is still forbidden, those who seek the knowledge of good and evil apart from God and His Spirit are engaged in the occult.

Even though discernment is a gift from God, it is also a discipline and exercise that we must actively seek and engage in order to grow and mature in this ability. Discernment is a skill that one learns in progressive manner as we obediently apply what we know in real life situations. It is not just a mystical feeling we have in our "gut" that tells us something is out of order. The Lord certainly gives us an uncomfortable "feeling" times but He desires that we would not rely on "feelings" but carefully examine, test and hold everything to the light of His Word. The Word repeatedly instructs us to actively use our minds to test along with a heart that is willing to obey what God is teaching us.

Have you ever received a gift that included the instructions, "some assembly is required?" Discernment is just such a gift! The Theological Word Study of the Old Testament states that while discernment is a gift from God, it does not come automatically. The possession of it requires persistent diligence, testing, judging, approving and applying through the objective source of truth—God's Word. It is a gift that grows progressively as we apply it in our daily lives! It is more than "Biblical IQ," or "knowledge," it grows as we are proven in character as we apply His truth. Prov. 2:1 The Word makes it clear that we gain discernment as we apply God's truth and wisdom from His Word. Biblical faith is not based on feelings but is rational, reasonable and intelligent. As we become mature in the mind of Christ, we grow in the gift of discernment.

Discernment is a word that appears frequently in the Old and New Testament. Each of the words used in the Hebrew and the Greek provide us with definitions to help us understand this gift of the LORD more fully. Note some of the following aspects of discernment based on the meaning of these words:

(See 1 Kings 3:9) 8085 "shama" is most often translated hearing but is also translated to discern or understand. It speaks of a "hearing or listening heart." It is a primitive root; to *hear* intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience.) It carries the idea of great attentiveness, carefully, consider, diligently, discern, give ear, (cause to, let, make to) hear (-ken, tell), × indeed, listen, make (a) noise, (be) obedient, obey, perceive, (make a) proclaim (-ation), understand, whosoever [heareth], witness.

2. (See Ps. 119:130) 995 “bin” translated 3x as discernment, in the Amplified says “understanding (discernment and comprehension). This word carries the idea that distinguishing between two things leads to understanding. It is knowledge that is far superior to the mere gathering of data, but also to know how to apply and utilize what you are learning. It is the power of judgment and perceptive insight demonstrated by the appropriate use of knowledge and wisdom. When one acts on the presentation of God’s revelation, he will attain the ideal significance of revelation. “ben” means “between or among” and refers to the interval or space between. It refers to judging, knowing and teaching, by distinguishing for example, discerning between good and evil. Prov. 3:5; Prov. 4:5-7 “diligently seek.” Wisdom advises a person to go in the way of understanding (Prov. 9:6,10; Job 28:28; Prov. 15:21)

3. Greek “diakrino” also refers to a separation, making distinction. 1 Cor. 2:14-16 uses this word 3x. Translates this word “Spiritually discerned”, judges and judged by no one.” It involves separating, looking for differences, understanding the times.

In summary, discernment is the application of truths in God’s Word in our lives, trusting God’s word to give us light and clarity so we can see and understand God’s ways as God sees them. Discernment is a skill that comes through training our minds and thoughts, enabled and equipped by God through His Word and by His Spirit. Discernment is wisdom in action.

- “Skill is reaching understanding and knowledge by the use of the process of separation: the divinely given ability to distinguish God’s thoughts and ways from all others.” Jay Adams, “A Call to Discernment”
- John MacArthur defined discernment as the ability to understand, interpret and apply truth skillfully.
- Tim Challies, “The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment,” (Crossway, 2007) defined it as “...the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.”

Digging Deeper in the Word

1. King Solomon: If one were to give a pop quiz by asking most believers what gift Solomon asked God to give him when he ascended his throne, most answer without hesitation and with great certainty that Solomon asked God for wisdom! Read 1 Kings 3:5-12. Note that Solomon asked for an understanding [listening heart] in order to discern between good and evil. This answer greatly pleased the Lord and in addition to discernment and God gave him wisdom as well. Wisdom is said to be the prerequisite to discernment. What character qualities does Solomon display when he makes this request for discernment? What pleased God regarding Solomon’s request?

2. How do we receive the gift of discernment? Read 1 Cor. 2:14-16

- Wisdom and the fear of the LORD are necessary ingredients for receiving discernment:
- We can ask God for discernment: Jer. 33:3; Dan. 12:8; Ps. 119:34; James 1:5
- Discernment requires the use of our minds, guided by the Holy Spirit: Deut. 13, esp. v.14³
- Discernment comes from meditation and application of the Word: Heb. 5:13-14; Heb. 4:12; John 17:17; Ps. 119:100, 104; 130; 2 Pet. 1:4

³ “Investigate thoroughly” is the Hebrew word for “inquire” or “seek” used in Deut. 13:14; 17:4; 12:5. The Hebrew word is “darash” (Strong’s 1875). It means to tread or frequent, to follow for pursuit or search. By implication, to seek or ask, specifically to care for diligently, inquire, to seek with great care, involving the intellect as well as the heart. To seek with love and affection, to search with great diligence with desire to hear from God, craving Him as your soul’s first necessity.

- Understanding comes as we stand in God's presence and seek Him: Ps. 73:17; Jer. 23:18,22
- It is a gift from God: Dan. 2:21; 1 Kings 3:9; Prov. 1:2-4; Prov. 2:6-8; Mal. 3:16-18
- It comes as we listen to the Lord and His word in order to obey and apply what we do know: Ps. 111:10; Prov. 2:9
- We can learn through the teaching of those who are mature in the Lord: Ezek. 44:23
- It increases with practice. Heb. 5:11-14

2. The Word instructs us to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We are to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. Examine the chart below and note the differences in the voice of the LORD vs. the Evil One. Remember the LORD told us to test the fruit! (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Rom. 16:19)

God's ways of Truth and Light	Satan's ways of Deception and Darkness
God's voice always speaks truth and is always consistent with the Word and Jesus words, actions and behavior. John 16:13	The deceiver is a liar and does not stand in the truth. While he speaks from the Word, it is twisted and out of context. Rev. 12:7; John 8:44
God's voice is usually gentle and free from pressure, He confirms His Word through many sources if we are unsure. The voice of the Shepherd gently guides us.	The voice of the enemy drives us. Satan's voice is demanding, usually pressuring us to act immediately without giving us time to pray and seek the LORD. Ps. 19
God leads us to praise and worship Him. Eph. 5:18,19	Satan seeks to cause us to be offended in God and to blame Him; or to praise and worship self or others
The Holy Spirit convicts us of specific sin and directs us the precious blood that washes whiter than snow. Isa. 1:18; 1 John 1:9	The Accuser of the brethren berates us for our blunders and condemns us for our sins and often speaks in generalities regarding our personality or temperament.
God's voice enables us to love others despite their sins and faults. Rom 5:5; Col. 1:4	Satan is the accuser of the brethren and his words sow seeds of offense, slander and accusation toward others. Rev. 12:10; 1 John 3:10
God directs us to keep our eyes on Him as the source of all that we need	Satan seeks attention to himself or focuses our attention on "man," -- self, reputation, physical needs, social positions, self-preservation.
God's voice brings true peace because it comes through His Word and His faithfulness.	Satan's words often provoke anxiety or a false peace based on unreliable foundations.
God gives us spirit of love and sound mind	Satan provokes us to Fear and confusion

3. There are also many scriptures that refer to those who do not have discernment, they are referred to as "simpleminded⁴," "naïve," and "dull of hearing," and "infants" or "babies in Christ." This is not a safe place for us to remain. Note the call to God's Word, wisdom and the fear of the LORD as a remedy for simplemindedness. How often do you hear the call to "listen" to the LORD? Heb. 5:11-14; Prov. 1 (entire ch., esp. v. 4, 22, 32-33); Ps. 19:7; Ps. 119:130; Prov. 7; Prov. 8:1-11; Prov. 9:1-10; 16-18; Prov. 14:15-16; Prov. 16: 21-22; Prov. 22:3

⁴ Simpleminded (Strong's 6612) means to be silly, seducible, foolish, to be open-minded, but not in good sense. To be open, spacious wide, related to immature or naïve as to what is right and wrong. Those who are open to all sorts of enticements, not having developed discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong. A simple or naïve person will believe anything. He refuses to learn and is on the road to inherit folly and death.

4. When facing a decision, ask the LORD for the gifts of wisdom and discernment. Ask the LORD to show You His will and submit yourself to Him regardless of whether the answer is what you want or not. Pray as Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” Ask the LORD to protect you from deception and to bind the enemy from seeking to influence you. Believe His promises that when we acknowledge Him in all of our ways and do not lean on our own understanding, that He will make our paths straight. When the answer remains unclear ask the LORD to give you confirmation. Confirmation may come through other believers, through His Word or other circumstances. Ask Him to give you peace only you are certain you have clearly heard His voice.

4. Read and meditate on the following verse, note what you learn about discernment. This is an excellent verse to copy onto a notecard and pray through it frequently for yourself, your family and for the Church.

Phil. 1:9-11 (Amp) *And this I pray: that your love may abound yet more and more and extend to its fullest development in knowledge and all keen insight [that your love may display itself in greater depth of acquaintance and more comprehensive discernment], So that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value [recognizing the highest and the best, and distinguishing the moral differences], and that you may be untainted and pure and unerring and blameless [so that with hearts sincere and certain and unsullied, you may approach] the day of Christ [not stumbling nor causing others to stumble]. May you abound in and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (of right standing with God and right doing) which come through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One), to the honor and praise of God [that His glory may be both manifested and recognized].*

What is God speaking to your heart?

What is your response to the Lord?