

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

DEFINITION

- The ability to make discriminating judgments; to distinguish between, and recognize the moral implications of different situations and courses of action to obtain spiritual direction and understanding
- The process of determining God's desire in a situation or for one's life, having a sense of how things look in God's eyes
- The ability to distinguish between good and evil, right or wrong, the permanent from the transient, the better from the good, and the best from the better
- It includes the ability to weigh and assess the moral and spiritual nature of individuals, groups and cultural movements

GOD IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF DISCERNMENT

Read 1Kings 3:6-14 What did Solomon ask for?

An _____ heart to _____ Your people to _____ between good and evil.

How would you describe Solomon's attitude?

How did God respond to Solomon's prayer?

Do you want discernment? If so, why?

HOW DISCERNMENT IS ACQUIRED

1. Knowledge from God

Read 1Cor 2:9-16

Who teaches us the things of God?

What is the pre-requisite for discerning all things?

What are the implications of the statement, "we have the mind of Christ."?

Read Proverbs 8:1-5

What is it that we're supposed to understand?

How are wisdom and knowledge related?

2. Wisdom from God (*James 1:5*)

- Wisdom and discernment go together (*Hosea 14:9*)
- Wisdom is a stepping stone to discernment (*Proverbs 8:12*)
"I, Wisdom, live together with good judgment.
I know where to discover knowledge and discernment."

Read Proverbs 1:20-33

What are the consequences of spurning knowledge and wisdom?

Read Proverbs 2:1-13

What are the consequences of pursuing knowledge and wisdom?

3. Experience over time (*Eph 4:11-16*)

Read Hebrews 5:13-14

How would you practice discernment?

Read 1Thes 5:21-22

What is the means of examination?

What does “everything” include?

Why should we examine “carefully”?

Read 1John 4:1-3

What do the spirits have to do with discernment?

How do you “test” them?

DISCERNING SELF

Read 1Cor 11:27-32 Why should we examine ourselves? How?

Read Psalms 139:23-24

Can you discern your own heart without God’s help?

How willing are you for God to reveal what’s buried inside?

DISCERNING OTHERS

Read Luke 19:1-10

Would you have noticed Zaccheus up in the tree? Why or why not?

If you had noticed Zaccheus in the tree what would you have done? Why?

Read Matt 22:15-22

How did Jesus recognize a lack of sincerity in the questions he was asked?

What can you learn from His example?

Read Proverbs 7:6-10

Why was the author able to say in verse 6 that the young man lacked sense?

What did the author observe that gave it away?

DISCERNING SITUATIONS

Read Eccl 8:1-6

What does this teach about when to act and when to wait?

What have you learned about the importance of timing?

How easy is it to wait, watch and listen rather than act?

Read Acts 23:1-11

What did Paul do to improve his situation before the Council?

How did Paul know what to do?

DISCERNING GOD'S AGENDA

- Observation: The outworking of God's plan ([Eph 1:11](#); [Rom 8:28](#))
 - Consciousness of God's plan

Read Matt 28:18-20 Who is responsible for carrying out this plan?

- Awareness of where God is working: We need to be alert to understand where God is actively carrying out His plan and how we fit into it.

Read Acts 11:1-18 What is described in this passage that is consistent with God's plan?

- Compulsion: God's guidance within ([Phil 2:12-13](#); [Rom 8:14](#))
 - Listening to God's voice

Read 1Cor 2:9-13 Why is it possible to misunderstand God's leading?

- Desire for discernment ([Psalm 119:66](#))

Read Psalm 119:66 Do you desire discernment or confirmation of your ideas? Explain.

- Evaluation: Reality check
 - Consistency with God's plan for me ([Eph 2:10](#); [2Tim 3:16-17](#))
 - Confirmed by the advice and counsel of others ([Pr 12:15](#))
 - Consistency with spiritual authority ([Heb 13:17](#))

HINDRANCES TO DISCERNMENT

- Business of life...keeps our focus on our own agenda. Limited time for anything else
- Self-focus...not willing to be interrupted
- Wrong attitude...can keep us from seeing things as God does

Are any of the above a hindrance to discernment in your life?
What is your plan to minimize/remove the hindrance?

APPENDIX

GOD IS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF DISCERNMENT

Read [1Kings 3:6-14](#) *What did Solomon ask for?*

An understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil.

How would you describe Solomon's attitude?

He approaches God humbly recognizing God's graciousness and his own insufficiency.

How did God respond to Solomon's prayer?

God was pleased with Solomon's prayer and granted his request, giving him a wise and discerning heart.

God also gave him riches and honor and promised to prolong his days as long as he would walk in His ways, keeping His statutes and commandments.

HOW DISCERNMENT IS ACQUIRED

1. Knowledge from God

Read [1Cor 2:9-16](#)

Who teaches us the things of God?

The Holy Spirit teaches us the things of God because they are spiritually discerned.

What is the pre-requisite for discerning all things?

Clearly only those who have the Spirit, love God, and are spiritual.

What are the implications of the statement, "we have the mind of Christ."?

We have access to the mind of Christ through the Spirit and can know what is revealed to us. However, the perfect mind of Christ is far beyond our complete comprehension. We are finite. He is infinite. We are incapable of fully grasping all that His mind contains.

Read [Proverbs 8:1-5](#)

What is it that we're supposed to understand?

We are to understand prudence and wisdom. Prudence is contrasted to naivety, that is being simple or non-discerning. Wisdom is contrasted to foolish thinking or behavior. We are being called in this passage to pursue and understand both prudence and wisdom. Without them we become prey for those who will take advantage and destroy.

How are wisdom and knowledge related?

"Knowledge is a familiarity, awareness, or understanding of someone or something, such as facts, skills, or objects." "Wisdom...is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense and insight." God's Word is a storehouse of knowledge where we can learn principles and instruction to equip us for living and serving in this world. Wisdom is acquired from God as we seek and experience His insight and direction ([James 1:5](#)). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" [Proverbs 9:10](#).

2. Wisdom from God

Read [Proverbs 1:20-33](#) *What are the consequences of spurning knowledge and wisdom?*

Decisions bring consequences; good or bad. Rejecting godly knowledge and wisdom potentially results in calamity, dread, distress, and anguish ([Pr 1:26-27](#)) and ultimately in death and destruction ([Pr 1:32](#)).

Read [Proverbs 2:1-13](#) *What are the consequences of pursuing knowledge and wisdom?*

If you seek knowledge and wisdom it will not be in vain because the Lord will reward your search with knowledge, understanding and wisdom. You will understand the fear of the Lord. You will understand righteousness, justice, equity and direction for your life. These qualities will guard you from evil and those who are ungodly.

3. Experience over time

Read [Hebrews 5:13-14](#) *How would you practice discernment?*

Practicing discernment is linked in these verses to the serious study of God's Word and applying it in daily life. Understanding of good and evil comes from what God has revealed in His Word. We practice discernment by applying God's Word to daily situations learning to perceive what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad, etc. Learning comes by repetition but also by increased understanding of good and evil.

Read [1Thes 5:21-22](#)

What is the means of examination? We measure things against the Word of God

What does "everything" include? Things, ideas, thoughts, statements, people, situations, self

Why should we examine "carefully"? We examine carefully because we are easily deceived. Therefore we go back to Scripture and search out answers.

Read [1John 4:1-3](#) *What do the spirits have to do with discernment? How do you "test" them?*

Discernment is necessary in order to test the spirits. Testing involves verification against a standard. The first and obvious standard is the Word of God. But John goes further to say that a false spirit would not agree that Jesus came in the flesh. In historical context there were some saying that Jesus was a phantom and not a real flesh and blood human. In the same way anyone that does not say that Jesus is divine is a also a false teacher.

DISCERNING SELF

Read [1Cor 11:27-32](#) *Why should we examine ourselves? How?*

We should examine ourselves so that God doesn't need to discipline us. Such an examination is to determine if we are approaching the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner. The Corinthians Paul was addressing were guilty of selfishness and lacking in consideration for each other. There were divisions and bad blood between them. We need to examine ourselves by evaluating our motives, and our relationship with God and others. Otherwise, we might find ourselves under the judgment of God like some of the Corinthians.

Read [Psalms 139:23-24](#) *Can you discern your own heart without God's help?*

Our tendency is to make excuses for our sinful thoughts and behavior. Often we don't even stop to realize what we're thinking and what lies deeper in our deceitful heart is unknown to us ([Jer 17:9-10](#)). We need to ask God to show us what doesn't measure up.

DISCERNING OTHERS

Read [Matt 22:15-22](#)

How did Jesus recognize a lack of sincerity in the questions he was asked?

First of all Jesus knew their hearts. After all He was God. But the wording of the statement before the question was clearly pandering and there was already a history of the Jewish leadership trying to trick Him with questions. The question itself was loaded and offered only two unacceptable answers that would put Him in jeopardy. Jesus cleverly avoided the trap by offering a third alternative. Discernment can be learned to handle such situations.

What can you learn from His example?

Always consider the source of questions or statements. Learns to recognize a setup so that you don't fall into the trap that others might set for you. We are constantly bombarded by misleading and partial information. Consider the source and learn to recognize patterns of deception.

Read [Proverbs 7:6-10](#)

Why was the author able to say in verse 6 that the young man lacked sense?

What did the author observe that gave it away?

The author could discern from the young man's actions that he lacked sense. He could see that the young man was headed down the street seeking out a harlot at her house. Actions, words, and behavior can be evaluated which allow us to discern the heart and character of others.

DISCERNING SITUATIONS

Read [Eccl 8:1-6](#)

What does this teach about when to act and when to wait?

Passions often get the best of us and we act prematurely which usually makes matters worse. This passage teaches that patience is usually necessary. We must learn to wait on God to help us to know the proper time and manner to say or act what is on our mind. We must learn to be "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" ([James 1:19](#)).

How easy is it to wait, watch and listen rather than act?

Self-control can be difficult when we are passionate about the situation. We must rely on God to guide us so we don't make a mess of things. Timing and manner of our response is critical. Sometimes it is even best not to do or say anything. Not every battle is worth participating in.

Read [Acts 23:1-11](#)

What did Paul do to improve his situation before the Council? How did Paul know what to do?

Paul took advantage of the fundamental difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the resurrection of the dead and used that knowledge to move the focus of attention from himself to them. In doing so he gained support from the Pharisees of which he was a member. His action was based on perceiving that both groups were present and his knowledge of the animosity between them.

DISCERNING GOD'S AGENDA

- Observation: The outworking of God's plan
 - Consciousness of God's plan
Read [Matt 28:18-20](#) *Who is responsible for carrying out this plan?*
In this passage Jesus is speaking directly to the eleven disciples who faithfully carried His instructions. More broadly, this is God's plan for His Church and its members. All believers are to be working in concert to carry out these instructions.
 - Awareness of where God is working
Read [Acts 11:1-18](#) *What is described in this passage that is consistent with God's plan?*
Peter described his experience of a vision from God and witnessed the Holy Spirit come upon the Gentiles as He had done with them. His conclusion was that God was granting salvation to the Gentiles just like the Jews and that it would be wrong to oppose what God was doing.
- Compulsion: God's guidance within
 - Listening to God's voice
Read [1Cor 2:9-13](#) *Why is it possible to misunderstand God's leading?*
We can be confused by human wisdom if we fail to listen to the Spirit's voice. If we focus on the things of God, that which is unseen ([2Cor 14:18](#)), and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we will be able to understand God's leading.