

What Is Discernment?

Biblical discernment is vitally important in this era in which we live. In its simplest form, discernment is nothing more than the ability to decide between truth and error. Discernment is the process of making careful distinctions in our thinking about truth.

First Thessalonians 5:21-22 teaches that it is the responsibility of every Christian to be discerning: “Prove all things [examine everything carefully]; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.” The apostle John issued a similar warning: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). Discernment is not optional for the Christian, it is a requirement.

“The key to living an uncompromising life lies in one’s ability to exercise discernment in every area of his or her life.” What a statement! Do you understand that one of the main causes as to why that so many Christians suffer an unfruitful life is because they have no discernment? Failure to discern between truth and error leaves the Christian subject to all manner of false teaching. False teaching then leads to an unbiblical mindset, which results in an unfruitful, and unproductive level of maturity. As a result, the Christian rides the emotional rollercoaster.

Do not be deceived, discernment intersects the Christian life at every point. And Peter declares that God’s Word provides us the needed discernment about all issues of life: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Peter 1:3).

Discernment – the ability to think from a biblical perspective about all areas of life – is indispensable to the Christian. It is incumbent upon Christians to seize upon the discernment that God has provided for in His Word. Without it, Christians are at risk of being emotionally traumatized.

Paul instructed the Ephesians that God had gifted the church with qualified leaders in chapter 4 and verse 11: “And he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists [church planters]; and some pastors and teachers.” In verse 12 of the same chapter Paul explains why God did this: “For the perfecting [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Now, note carefully why chapter 4 and verses 11-12 are so important: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Brethren, without discernment your life cannot be pleasing to God. Because, where there is no discernment, there is no stand for truth. Christians cannot just float down the stream of life and think that all is well! All is not well when you compromise truth, or close your eyes to error! To be without discernment is to be without the ability to think for yourself, and this is dangerous not only for yourself, but for those who need you the most!

When Paul spoke to the church at Corinth concerning the confusion of tongues he made a statement that is crucial in every area of life. He said to the church, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (I Corinthians 14:20).

Jerry W. Arnold
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