

#92 “Developing Discernment”
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In a day and age where false teaching abounds more and more, discernment is something that God’s people need more than ever. Now this idea of things going from bad to worse in terms of the propagation of lies and half-truths is not mere rhetoric but Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:13 says, “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” The reality is that evil men (and women) and impostors abound. They deceive the masses because they look like the real deal, but, of course, they are fakes. Even they themselves are deceived such that they might even think they are on the side of truth and glory when in reality they are doing the work of the devil himself. Deception is a very sticky trap because, once deceived, people can be blind to the fact that they are even bound by the devil and doing the work of evil. Yet this is reality. Today, more than ever before, deceptions abound along with those doing the deceiving and being deceived themselves. Tomorrow will be worse than today and so on and so forth. This is the truth from Scripture that deceptions will increase in number, in power, in subtlety, and in severity. Sadly, too many believers don’t recognize just how pervasive the threat is and how prevalent it is. Deceptions are everywhere. We must grow mature in our faith such that we can recognize truth from error and grow in our ability to discern.

When “discernment” shows up in the Scripture, the words from which it is translated invoke the idea of wisdom, understanding, insight, and reasoning (e.g. 1 Kings 4:29, Proverbs 2:3, Daniel 2:14, Philippians 1:9). It incorporates the ability to identify lies, the skill of being able to rightly divide the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15), and the spiritual sensitivity to be alert to the work of the enemy. As our right understanding of Scripture grows, our discernment can be honed and sharpened. This is not just Bible knowledge, facts, and trivia, but it is a work of God in our hearts as we humble ourselves to be taught His Word. Diligence in studying the Scripture is fundamental to being discerning. Many people trump the Scripture for their own ideas and self-proclaimed authority, and we must always remember that the Scripture is the sole and final authority for truth and life. There are those who know the Bible well but who are still deceived. So we must not think that mere intellectual growth in Bible knowledge will keep us from succumbing to the devil’s wiles. Faith is our shield against his missiles of deceit and temptation (Ephesians 6:16), and God will give wisdom to His children who are humble enough to recognize that they need it. As 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”

We must keep learning the Bible, for the more we know it, the more we can be set free and be equipped so that we can avoid being deceived (Hosea 4:6). Yet, this very important truth must be processed along with the idea that we cannot rely upon our own minds to be the sole means to substantiate our ability to discern, lest we fall. Our hope in having wisdom, discernment, and understanding is never the intellect alone. It is never the ability to read people alone. It is never prior experience alone. God can and does teach us through our minds and through our experiences, but we must remember that the way to increase in wisdom is simply to ask for it. God will take care of the rest of it as we

walk by faith and in obedience.

James 1:5 says, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” Solomon, the wisest man ever to live, also asked of God for wisdom, and God bestowed it upon him (1 Kings 4:29). Wisdom is given to us by God as we ask Him in faith. It is not self-generated, but it is a gift of God. God’s grace then infuses our study of Scripture so that we grow in wisdom. The Spirit’s prompting in our hearts becomes finely tuned so that we are alert when we need to be alert. Discernment is God’s gracious gift to those who seek it by faith. Those who really want discernment will then do as the Bereans did when they daily searched the Scriptures to see if what they were being taught was indeed true (Acts 17:11). Those who seek to grow in discernment won’t believe somebody just because he or she has written a best selling book, has built a national ministry, has a theology degree, or is a good communicator. They will believe a person only when he or she teaches the truth of the Scripture. To get better and better at this (and none of us have arrived or are totally immune to the deceptions around us) we must be students of the Book, students who do not gloat in our understanding but rather students who continue to ask God for wisdom. God does not want those who think that they have arrived but rather those who understand that they have not. We must recognize our human weakness, fallibility, and vulnerability such that we humbly ask God for wisdom. He will give it to those who ask in faith (James 1:5) and who are humble, teachable, contrite, and trembling before His Word (Isaiah 66:2).

Colossians 2:3 says, “In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Therefore, we can never afford to neglect turning to God for wisdom and discernment. He will train us and teach us, but we must be continually willing to learn, willing to admit when we were wrong, willing to be humbled, and willing to keep seeking. As deceptions increase, so must our ability to discern them. May God increase our discernment so that we can see as He sees, looking beyond the lies and loving only the truth.