

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Maintains A Discerning Heart

Charles Itseghosimhe

Last week, we learned that we can develop spiritual maturity by being willing to accept and maintain the status of a child. In Jewish society, Jewish children had no status; a child was someone to be looked after, not someone to be looked up to. The child is to look up to the parents for guidance and direction.

Our responsibility is to accept that we have no status at all (of our own) so there should be no need to *measure ourselves by ourselves or compare ourselves with ourselves* (**2 Corinthians 10:12**).

This will enable us to learn humility, discipline, forgiveness, and to get along with one another.

Jesus Christ is our standard for measuring our growth and maturity. Any lifestyle, action, and decision that does not conform to that of Christ, is always a reflection of spiritual immaturity.

The standard of spiritual maturity is humble and selfless service to God and to others.

In today's discussion, we will look at, *maintaining a discerning heart*, as a way of developing spiritual maturity.

What's so special about having and maintaining a discerning heart? What is the meaning of the word *discerning*? How is maintaining a discerning heart connected to spiritual maturity?

THE SPECIALTY OF DISCERNMENT

In **1 Kings 3:4-14**, we have the account of Solomon's conversation with God.

Solomon, son of David, ascended to the throne of king of Israel, at the death of his father, when he was less than eighteen years of age.

He went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices and the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon did not ask for long life or wealth for himself. Often, we fail to pray for others (parents, spouses, relatives, neighbours, friends, enemies, colleagues, employers, employees, politicians, brethren, leaders, the church, etc.) Greater portion of our prayers are centred on ourselves.

1 Timothy 2:1-3 *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior.*

James 4:3 *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Solomon did not ask for the death of his enemies. Many times, we pray for the death of our enemies.

Matthew 5:44-45 *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*

Solomon asked for a discerning heart to govern Israel and to distinguish between right and wrong. He asked for discernment in administering justice

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So, God granted him what he asked for—a wise and discerning heart, and added both wealth and honor, including a long life—if he walks in obedience to God.

Solomon was able to administer justice in Israel. The people saw that the wisdom of God was in him. He enjoyed peace with other nations. He had no adversary nor evil occurrence at that time (**1 Kings 3:28; 5:4,7**).

This means that a discerning heart is always pleasing to God.



WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

The word **discern** has roots in many Greek words. One of such Greek words is **ἀνακρίνω** (anakrino — an-ak-ree'-no) which means to separate out so as to investigate by looking throughout objects or particulars, to examine, to scrutinize, to determine the excellence or defects of a person or thing.

A discerning heart uses the wisdom of God to examine what it sees, hears, and does. In doing so, it considers the following questions:

What is right and wrong in God's sight?

The focus here is the ability to see things for what they really are in God's sight and to accept God's position on everything without fault-finding or playing the blame game (consider Adam and Eve...*the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate...the serpent deceived me and I ate* **Gen. 2:16,17; 3:11-13**) or providing an excuse for rejecting God's position (consider Saul...*brought back Agag king of Amalek...but the people took of the plunder, sheep, and oxen, the best of the things...1 Samuel 15;20-22...consider Uzzah holding the ark of God and was struck by God for his error* **1 Chronicles 15:12-15; 2 Samuel 6:6,7**).

What is right and almost right in man's sight?

Here, it's about the ability to identify those things that human has defined to be right (because that is what they want right to be) and reject them.

When a human wants to commit sin, he rationalizes God out of his thoughts, that is, he does not want to think about God; he does not want to consider the feelings of God; he does not want God to be his standard of

measure. At this point, man is looking for what he (not God) wants to be right.

We can see the case of the world using its free will in the legalization of abortions, homosexual marriages, smoking including the use of marijuana for personal pleasures, alcoholic drinking, nudity, gambling, corruption, etc.

A discerning heart identifies the *ways that seem right to man* (**Proverbs 14:12**).

What is the more excellent way that brings glory to God and uplifts the church?

There are many areas of spiritual maturity that are not matters of black and white, that is, not written as *you shall not, do not, must be, etc.*

In such areas, Jesus Christ expects us to make a lot of comparisons across all cases of such matters in the Bible, what references were made, what examples were given, what application was used, what area of God's law is dependent on another area and what is most excellent in God's sight.

An example was the error of the scribes and Pharisees who could not discern that for payment of *tithe of mint and anise and cummin* to be accepted by God, one must apply *justice, mercy, and faith*. Thus, justice, mercy, and faith were the foundations of every law being practiced. Jesus said *that these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone* (**Matthew 23:23-24**).

This matches with Jesus Christ's command that to get along well (peace, forgiveness, support, etc.) with others in the church and the society is the foundation upon which our worship, gift, and service will be accepted by God

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (**Matthew 5:23-24**).

Most Christians agonize over controversial questions which are not specifically answered in the Scriptures.

Consider the case of doing good (benevolent works) - many congregations want to see where God specifically says this work must be done by the church before they get involved in such work or take ownership of such work.

What about the case of alcoholic drinking - many want to see where God expressly says (in the New Testament) - do not drink at all, before they abstain from it.

Consider "Christian" businessmen who do not drink alcohol themselves but nevertheless host parties where alcohol is shared. Some even send gifts of liquor to their customers or employees.

A discerning heart examines all areas to determine what is most pleasing to God.

Philippians 1:10 *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*

Philippians 4:8-9 *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Paul addressed the church in Corinth on issues of gifts. After commenting on prophecy and tongues in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul concludes by saying, *and yet I will show you the most excellent way (verse 31).*

This indicates that a discerning heart examines everything and acts upon what is uplifting, beneficial, and constructive to the glory of God, the growth of the church, and the development of its spiritual maturity (**1 Cor 6:12;10:23**).

A discerning heart calls for open-minded study, meditation, and in-depth examination (**2 Tim. 2:15**).

DISCERNMENT AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Hebrews 5:14 *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

There are no shortcuts on the road to spiritual maturity. Maintaining a discerning heart calls for great efforts on the part of each Christian.

The mind has to be trained by practice.

We can develop the necessary sensitivity to make moral decisions only through such training.

Our minds should be trained to "distinguish good from evil." Without this training, we have no way to evaluate new ideas.

We may easily become prey for any new popular idea. Without disciplined training in the "word of righteousness," we cannot distinguish between the Christian faith and the many other claims.

We grow when we study with enough seriousness to be prepared to hear the whole story, not just the parts we prefer to hear.

Sometimes, the causes of most quarrels and fights among us are incomplete information, bias, and assumption.

1 Corinthians 6:5 *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?*

James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*

A discerning heart wants to examine all sides to an issue to have a better understanding and makes an excellent decision.

Even in our personal Bible study, when we limit our study to only a few sections, maybe just to prove a point, we are not discerning at that time and that affects our level of maturity.

Many exhibits an unbelievable immaturity when it comes to faith because of a lack of or inability to maintain a discerning heart.

CONCLUSION

A discerning heart is always pleasing to God. It is a blessing of wisdom. It enables one to develop spiritual maturity. It

strengthens the leaders-followers relationship. It adds stability and peace to any congregation.

We need a discerning heart. We need to maintain a discerning heart

REFERENCES

Bill Smith (1987, 2005) "The Discerning Steward" (*Truth for Today*)

George Sweeting (1997, 1998) "Solomon The Wisest and Most Foolish Man" (*Truth for Today*)

James Thompson (1991, 2003) "Developing Christian Maturity" (*Truth for Today*)

David Roper (1993, 2003) "The Need For Spiritual Growth" (*Truth for Today*)

Jay Lockhart (1986, 2004) "The Rational Sinner" (*Truth for Today*)

W. W. Heflin (1989, 2003) "The Weightier Matters Of the Law" (*Truth for Today*)

Truth for Today (2008) "Rejoicing in Christ"

Vines, W. E., M. A. Entry for 'Discern, Discerner, Discernment'. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words. <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/ved/d/discern-discerner-discernment.html>. 1940.