

A Recipe for Discernment, Part 3

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:11–15; 2 Timothy 2:15

Code: B140515

This post was first published during May 2014. –ed.

True biblical discernment isn't developed by osmosis. It's cultivated over time, as a believer matures in faith. The last few days, we've been considering the essential ingredients for discernment, including consistent prayer, the pursuit of godly wisdom, moral integrity, and the necessity of faithful Bible teaching and teachers. But none of those elements can function properly apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Depend on the Holy Spirit

The Spirit of God is ultimately the true Discerner. It is His role to lead us into all truth (John 16:13). First Corinthians 2:11 says, "The thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." Paul goes on to write:

We have received . . . the Spirit who is from God, so that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. (1 Corinthians 2:12–15)

Discernment ultimately depends on the Holy Spirit. As we are filled with and controlled by the Spirit of God, He makes us discerning.

Study the Scriptures

It cannot be overemphasized: True discernment requires diligent study of the Scriptures. None of the other previously stated steps is sufficient apart from this. No one can be truly discerning apart from mastery of the Word of God. All the desire in the world cannot make you discerning if you don't study Scripture. Prayer for discernment is not enough. Obedience alone will not suffice. Good role models won't do it either. Even the Holy Spirit will not give you discernment *apart* from His Word. If you really want to be discerning, you must diligently study the Word of God.

God's Word is where you will learn the principles for discernment. It is there you will learn the truth. Only there can you follow the path of maturity.

Discernment flourishes only in an environment of faithful Bible study and teaching. Note that in Acts 20, when Paul was leaving the Ephesian elders, he warned them about the deadly influences that would threaten them in his absence (Acts 20:28–31). He urged them to be on guard, on the alert.

How? What safeguard could he leave to help protect them from Satan's onslaughts? Only the Word of God: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

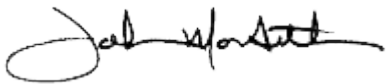
Let's look once more, closely, at 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Notice what this mandate to Timothy implies. First, it suggests that the discerning person must be able to distinguish between the Word of Truth and the "worldly and empty chatter" mentioned in verse 16. That may seem rather obvious. But it cannot be taken for granted. The task of separating God's Word from human foolishness actually poses a formidable challenge for many today. One look at some of the nonsense that proliferates in churches and Christian media will confirm that this is so. Or note the burgeoning stacks of "Christian" books touting weird views. We must shun such folly and devote ourselves to the Word of God. We have to be able to distinguish between the truth and error.

How? "Be diligent." Being diligent pictures a worker giving maximum effort in his or her work. It describes someone driven by a commitment to excellence. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God." The Greek phrase literally speaks of standing alongside God as a colaborer worthy of identifying with Him.

Furthermore, Paul says this approved workman "does not need to be ashamed." The word "ashamed" is very important to Paul's whole point. Any sloppy workman *should* be ashamed of low-quality work. But a servant of the Lord, handling the Word of Truth carelessly, has infinitely more to be ashamed of.

What Paul suggests in this passage is that we will be ashamed before God Himself if we fail to handle the Word of Truth with discernment. If we can't distinguish the truth from worldly and empty chatter, if we can't identify and refute false teachers, or if we can't handle God's truth with skill and understanding, we *ought* to be ashamed.

And if we are to divide the Word of Truth rightly, then we must be very diligent about studying it. There is no shortcut. Only as we master the Word of God are we made "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). That is the essence and goal of discernment.



(Adapted from *Reckless Faith*.)

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2024 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).