Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Responsibilities of the Church: Discernment, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-147

Ihave received not a few letters, quite a number, in fact, from folks who suggest to me subjects that I might address in this series on the Anatomy of the Church. And I have received a few, sort of a steady stream, along with some personal requests if I would address the subject of discernment. And so though I have addressed it seemingly often in the past, I know there are many of you who are new and we all need to kind of rehearse this great theme, I've chosen today to look at the subject of discernment because of its importance and because it has been requested by folks in the church.

We're doing a series on the anatomy of the church and we sort of extended Paul's metaphor that the church is the body of Christ and we saw in the church a skeleton, some basic framework, some foundational doctrine. We saw in the church internal systems which are spiritual attitudes. And now we're dealing with the muscles of the church or the functions of the church. What the church actually does when it functions. And we've talked about some of the necessary functions in the church like fellowship and preaching and teaching the Word. And today we come to this matter of discernment which is a function of the church. It is so outlined in a verse that is becoming familiar to you, I think, 1 Timothy 3:15 where the Apostle Paul describes the church with this description. "The church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

He could have said the church of the living God, the assembly of the redeemed. He could have said the fellowship of believers. He could have said the body of Christ. He could have said the saints that are headed to heaven. He could have said the sanctified. He could have said the justified. But he chose to say the church, the pillar and support of the truth. That is a defining definition. That is central, foundational to what the church is. A church is a pillar and support of the truth.

Why so? Because as I told you a few weeks ago, the number one problem in the world is deception. And the number one problem in the church is deception. And the only way you can deal with deception is to bring the truth to bear against it. Therefore discernment is produced by the knowledge of the truth. If someone knows the truth, they have the discernment to understand error.

Now it is important for us to remember this that Satan primarily is disguised as an angel of light. He goes around espousing what people are to accept as truth, when in fact it is not truth. Satan is a liar, John 8:44, and the father of lies. He is a deceiver by nature. And he goes about espousing lies which are exposed by the truth. Now we all know we live in a world of lies. We live in a world of lies at every

level. We are lied to in the scientific world by the foundation of all contemporary science which is evolution which is a lie. We are lied to on the basis of all moral issues in our world by the lie that you can do anything you want and whatever feels good is right. We are lied to about the future, by the contemporary interest in life-after-death folks who tell us that it's all hearts and flowers and warm and fuzzies and lights at the end of tunnels and there's nothing to fear. We're lied to at every level of our life. We are lied to philosophically. We are lied to psychologically. We are lied to at all levels. Satan has espoused a world of lies on every front and the only protection you have against it is the truth and the only place the truth is upheld is the church. We alone adhere to the Word of God which is the truth.

But not only are we in a world of lies but, sad to say, the world has had a great effect on the church and the church has been infiltrated with lies. And that's always, of course, Satan's effort, he wants to destroy the church. The world is already his. It's a great place to hatch the lies. But the ultimate plan is to make those lies find their way into the church so that the church becomes confused about God's truth.

Turn, if you will, to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. This is a bit of a preview because when we get back to our series in 2 Corinthians, which we will sometime this summer when I get my study Bible done and I have the time to go back to it, we'll get back to it, and when we get back to it we'll go right back to chapter 11, but I want to give you a preview here, just to let you know I haven't forgotten what is here. The first three verses Paul, you'll remember, is writing to the Corinthians very concerned because some false teachers have come to Corinth and taught lies, taught errors, taught deception and created havoc in the church. And Paul is writing this very passionate letter to the people to call them back to him and back to the truth. He says in verse 1, "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness, but at least you are bearing with me," a little bit of sarcasm there. He's saying you need to tolerate what to you might seem like foolishness, tolerate my passion here. Why? Verse 2, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy."

Paul was not saying, "Well this is a carnal thing with me, this is a personal thing with me. I don't like somebody messing up my church because it impacts negatively on my reputation. I don't like somebody else stealing my sheep. I don't like losing in that kind of a battle. It's sort of an ego fight with me." That's not what he's saying. There were people who were turning away from Paul, people who were becoming disinterested in his teaching and following false teachers. He says I'm jealous for you but it's not a carnal jealousy, it's a godly one.

The reason I am very concerned about you following other teachers and not me, the reason I'm very concerned about you believing things that I don't teach is not for some personal reason, but it's for some godly reason. And here it is, verse 2, "I have betrothed you to one husband...that is to Christ...that I might present you as a pure virgin."

In other words, when I brought you to Christ that was only the beginning. I want to bring you all the way to the time when I present you to Him as a pure virgin. I want to maintain your purity. What does he mean? Your doctrinal purity and your behavioral purity, your moral purity. And when you are led astray by false teachers, you do not remain doctrinally pure and consequently you will not remain behaviorally or morally pure either because how you live is a direct outgrowth of what you believe. I'm unwilling to turn you over to people who teach you error cause I understand it affects your purity of doctrine and your purity of life.

This is a faithful pastor talking, folks. I understand this. When people leave this church, if I am concerned about it, if I am exercised about it, it cannot be because of some carnal jealousy...I don't like to see some other pastor win them over, or some other teacher be thought to be a better teacher than myself...that is not the issue. That cannot be the issue, that is sin. But I'll tell you this, I do not rejoice in my heart when someone leaves what I know to be a place where the truth is clearly taught and clearly delineated for a place where it is not because I understand the implications of that in their life. And it is to be a godly jealousy with which we hold on to the sheep that God has given us and not easily turn them over to someone else to someone else who may not with the same precision and the same clarity and the same accuracy and the same conviction and the same strength and the same consistency and the same maturity teach them the Word of God. That's going to have tremendous implications in their life and the life of those they influence, including their families. Paul says I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

It grieves my heart when someone goes from Grace Church and moves somewhere else and calls back or writes back and says, "We can't find a place where the Word of God is faithfully taught." Because that's a grievous situation and you know that if people are exposed to error long enough, exposed to weak teaching long enough, it definitely has an impact. Paul is saying I cannot just turn you over to this, I am too jealous in a godly way for you.

What are you afraid of, Paul? Verse 3, "I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity that is related to Christ." That's the point. Now listen very carefully. I am afraid you will be deceived. In the same way that Eve was deceived by the craftiness of the serpent you will be beguiled.

It's amazing how adept people are at teaching error. Amazing how clever they are. They can win massive followings, can't they? It's amazing how fast people who know the Lord know a little bit of Scripture who aren't strong in the Word can be led astray. Paul says I don't want that to happen. I espouse you to Christ with the intention of carrying you through and presenting to Christ in the end a chaste virgin, a pure virgin, pure in doctrine, pure in conduct. And my fear is that you're going to get exposed to error and that that error is going to deceive you and lead your mind astray.

Let me tell you, all Christianity precedes from the mind. It is not an emotional thing. It has emotion but the only appropriate emotional response is when the emotions are set into action by the truth that is in the mind. Bypassing the mind to get to the emotions is manipulation unacceptable. Paul says my concern is that somebody is going to get to your mind and you're going to start to believe the wrong things. When you are exposed, according to 2 Timothy chapter 2:15 to 18, when you're exposed to error, it eats like gangrene. And overexposure to error will assault the truth and begin to break it down.

We often ask ourselves how it is that men who have written books that we all applaud and enjoy and we've read can reach a place in their life where they become annihilationists which is to deny hell or they become universalists which is to say that everybody is going to go to heaven, or they've changed their view on this doctrine or that doctrine, and in most cases they have maintained their presence in an environment of critical academic theology which has systematically eaten away at the foundations of their convictions. It can happen even to the best and does because Satan is so crafty.

Go back to Genesis 3 with me and find out how it was that the serpent did deceive Eve. We'll look more at this when we get into this passage, but at least a brief look at chapter 3 of Genesis. "The serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." That is to say when possessed by Satan. "And he said to the woman," now here's Satan and here's a good insight into how he operates, he said, "Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree in the Garden? And the woman said to the serpent, From the fruit of the trees of the Garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the Garden God had said you shall not eat from it or touch it lest you die." That's pretty straightforward. He says - is there any tree in this Garden that you've been told you can't eat? She says yeah, there's one. It wasn't that there was some noxious or some poisonous fruit because it was a perfect unfallen world. It was just that that tree was a test, that's all. Yeah, there's one we can't eat of, and she even adds we can't even touch it and that was probably a word from her husband fearing that she might eat it, she said don't touch it, keeping her away at a distance. We don't know exactly.

But anyway, "Then the serpent said to the woman," verse 4, "You shall surely not die for God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God knowing good and evil," and what could be more noble than being like God? Certainly God would want that, wouldn't He?

This is the deception. He was not...he was not playing to some sort of innate lust that Eve had for whatever was hanging on that tree, she didn't have any innate lust. She was without sin. He wasn't playing to some potential temptation. She didn't have any internal temptation solicitation device. It wasn't that she was..."Oh, I really want to eat that thing." There was no such desire, there was no such lust at all. It was all deception. He didn't play to her lust. He didn't tempt her because there was something unique about this fruit that made it so desirable she could hardly resist it.

It was purely deception and the deception goes a little like this...You must have misunderstood God, look at this beautiful Garden God made, look at this thing, this magnificent Garden and He said you could have all of this and this is a perfect world and you must have misunderstood what He meant. I mean, surely you're not going to die. I mean, that's impossible. What dies? What's death? What's that? You must...oh, you must have misunderstood, and what could be more marvelous, what could be more noble than being like God? He knows that if you would eat of that you would be like Him.

Oh... She was totally beguiled. He wasn't playing to her desire to sin, she didn't have any desire. He was playing to the one desire she did have and that was a noble one, to be like...what?...like God. Eve must have misunderstood. I mean, He knows if you do that you're going to be like Him and what could be a greater thing....?

Isn't that what the cults always promise? They don't say, "Follow this error and go to hell." Right? They say, "Follow this error and go to God." Right? "Ascend to the heights of religion." Satan is always disguised as an angel of light. And what he's telling you is you'll be...you'll be closer to God, this is the truth, this will elevate. That's the deception. She bought it.

What do you think those false teachers said when they came to Corinth? "Eat and you'll die." No. "Follow our teaching and you'll go to hell forever." No. "Follow our teaching and you'll have more fun in life." No. They said, "Follow our teaching and you'll get closer to God." That's always Satan's lie.

You think Mormons believe that, don't you? Jehovah's Witnesses believe that. Every cult and ism and schism and spasm and yogi and whatever else on the face of the earth, they all have the same basic goal...to get to God, right? That's Satan's lie. This is the fast track to God. This is the fast track to spirituality. This is the fast track to heaven. This is the elevated knowledge. This is the real stuff. Surely you misunderstood what God said. Surely there's some confusion here. God would want you to be like Him. What's death? Whoever heard of that? You must have misunderstood.

And she bought it hook, line and sinker. Paul said the reason...the reason I don't want you following those people because that's what they'll do to you. They'll tell you there's some other way to God. There's some other path to spirituality. There's some other source of enlightenment, that the real truth is in this group or that group or their theory or this doctrine.

Any pastor who has any sense of the responsibility before God to protect his sheep, to warn, to watch, to oversee, realizes that perverse men are just waiting to rise up and wolves are just waiting to come in and tear up the sheep. So the thing you want to do to protect your people is to teach them to be discerning, right? That is a function of the church so that they're not just blown all over the place and strung out and carried away by every wind of doctrine. And I would say that the single greatest problem in the church today is its inability to do that. I don't know that there's ever been a time when

the church in the evangelical church as we know it has been as utterly undiscerning as it is now and furthermore to be so disinterested in being discerning, like being discerning is bad, like discerning people are a problem, they're narrow-minded, they're critical, they're judgmental, they lack love, and so forth.

It is this very issue that causes evangelical Christianity to be fighting for its very life. In fact, I was talking to some people this last week who said that they think the word "evangelical" is gone, it's been redefined in such non-descript and imprecise terms that we can't really use it anymore. We have to come up with another term. So if you think of a good one, let me know. We can start a movement, you and me, with the right term. If there's any problem that outstrips all other problems in the church, it is this problem of a lack of discernment, the lack of spiritual discrimination because then everybody is vulnerable. And imagine living in a time when not only is the church undiscerning, but sees discernment as a threat to its life and unity. It's just amazing. Widespread ignorance, shallow understanding of Scripture, superficiality interpreting the Bible, faulty reasoning, bad decisions just bring horrendous agony to the church. How foolish can we be? I mean, the Bible is so consistent in telling us beware of ear-tickling teachers, beware of departing from the faith, beware of heresies, doctrines of demons, destructive myths, perverse teachings, commandments of men, speculations, controversial issues, old wives fables, deceitful spirits, worldly tales, false knowledge, science falsely so-called, empty philosophy, traditions of men, worldly wisdom, adulterations of the Scripture and on and on and on and on. Beware of those who come who are wolves dressed up in sheep's clothing, trying to pass themselves off as prophets. And they will get worse and worse as time comes, as we saw a few weeks ago. There is just an absolute world of chaos and confusion and deception infiltrating the church today and instead of the church raising its guard, the church lowers it and lowers it and lowers it. And just when the deception reaches massive proportions, there is a disinterest in teaching the Word of God, preaching some kind of message that's going to be relevant to people's cultural hot buttons. No one who understands the warnings of Scripture who understands anything about the character of Satan, who understands anything about his strategies, should stand by and let everybody be gullible as if everyone who claims to speak the truth does speak the truth. How foolish is that? But people do it all the time...all the time. The church is like the Pharisees of Jesus' day. In Matthew 16 He said to the Pharisees, when it's a certain kind of sky and it's a certain color, you say it's going to rain and when it's another kind of color you say it's not going to rain. And that's a pretty primitive simplistic way to tell the weather, but He says you're better at that than you are theology. That's how much discernment you've got. You can't even distinguish what's going on. Here's the King right here talking to you and you don't even know it. The ability to distinguish between the false and the true is absolutely essential in the church. And the church is the pillar and support of the truth. That's what we do. And we do that to protect God's people from error so that they can bring the truth to others.

Now all of that warms us up to go back to the most direct text, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and we want to interact with that text a little bit in our time this morning. And it's a familiar one to us and it's

certainly not difficult to interpret but it is so specific that it leaves us with nothing less than an absolute mandate. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 there are a number of straight forward injunctions for Christians that sort of sum up the Christian life. They talk about how we are to live in the church. Start in verse 12, talking about appreciating those who are over us, honoring our leaders. Verse 13, living in peace with each other. Verse 14, admonishing folks, encouraging them and all of that. Verse 15, not repaying evil for evil but seeking what is good. Verse 16, rejoicing always. Verse 17, praying without ceasing. Verse 18, giving thanks in everything for this is God's will, and so forth. Verse 19, not quenching the Spirit. Everybody agrees on those, nobody really has a problem. Everybody's sure, amen to that. We know we want to follow our leaders and honor them. We want to live in peace. We want to admonish those who need help, encourage those who are faint-hearted. We want to return good for evil. Rejoice, always pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, and we never want to quench the work of the Holy Spirit.

Then we come to verse 20, 21, and 22 and all of a sudden people start parting company.

Verse 20, "Do not despise prophetic utterances." The word "despise" means to downgrade, to belittle, to trivialize or to make light of. "Prophetic utterances" is one word in the Greek, prophetaos...prophetaos. It simply means the skill for public proclamation, preaching, proclamation of God's Word is the issue here. Don't belittle it. Don't make light of it. Don't downgrade the preaching of God's Word. According to 1 Peter if any man speaks, let him speak the oracles of God, 1 Peter 4:11. If any man speaks, let him speak the oracles of God. So when anybody speaks we can't despise that. He is speaking with a God-given gift for proclaiming the truth. So when you hear someone speak, you can't look down on that, you can't belittle or downgrade that. Preaching he's talking about, the old world preachments, sermons, proclamations. Don't belittle them, don't look down on them. But...verse 21..."But don't just be gullible, examine everything carefully." You don't want to downgrade or belittle preaching, but you do want to examine it...you do want to examine it.

And how do you examine it? Well examine is dokimazo in the Greek, it means in metallurgy to test a metal to find out if it's pure. We would call it assaying a metal, such is done with gold. Assay it, test it to see if it's pure truth. Don't just take anything that's said. Don't be beguiled by the preacher. Examine it carefully, test it. There's only one thing you can test it against and that's the Word of God, right? What did the noble Bereans do in Acts 17? They searched the Scripture to see if these things were so. Test it. It's very obvious to me that there are preachers all across the globe and all across our nation who go on collecting masses of people around them who must not test anything. I was talking with one of the leaders in the Southern Baptist movement, in fact the president of the convention, Southern Baptist Convention. He was telling me about a prominent television preacher that you perhaps have heard because he's on all the time and is not a healer type but he's a very fiery preacher. And when you listen to him, much of what he says is true to Scripture and sounds good and he preaches the gospel and all of that.

And he was saying to me...the interesting thing about this fellow whom he knows is that he has a kind of interesting theology in one area of his system.

And I said, "What's that?"

He said, "Well he's convinced that Jews don't have to come to Christ because they get into heaven through another way."

And I said, "Well how do you come up with that? That certainly wasn't Jesus' attitude toward them and that's certainly not what it says in the book of Acts that there's salvation by none other name. And certainly Zechariah 12 says that Israel is going to be saved when they look on Him whom they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only son, and then a fountain of blessing will be opened up to them and cleansing from sin. Where does that come from?"

He said, "Well I think he got it from an Israeli guide."

"Well," I said, "that...that answers that question."

And you ask yourself, you know, can we just tolerate that? Can we just happily come to the conclusion that Jews have another way of salvation? What a frightening conclusion to come to. And there are aberrations of every imaginable sort and every unimaginable sort floating around all over the place at a time when the church disdains to be discerning. I hear of them incessantly week after week in my life and I wonder who's testing these things. And when they're tested, we need to address those issues. But if you do, you're seen as judgmental. So be it. According to Ephesians Paul said to the Ephesians that they needed to make an effort to learn what was pleasing to the Lord. And I'll tell you what is most pleasing to the Lord is the truth. God hates...what?...a lie. And God hates a distortion of His Word because He's exalted His Word to the very point of His name. Any distortion of His Word is equal to blaspheming His name.

It was said of King David in 2 Samuel 14:17 he was able to discern good and evil. That is...that is to be the characterization of any faithful man of God, he must be discerning. So, Paul says to the Thessalonians and to all of us, don't despise preaching but examine it, test it against the Scripture. And then in verse 21 he says, "Hold fast to that which is good." When you determine something is true and kalos, that is inherently genuine, hold on to it, make it your own, take possession of it, wholeheartedly embrace it. But on the other hand, verse 22, when you determine that it is evil, that it is error, shun it, abstain from it. It means to hold yourself away from something, push it as far away as you can because being exposed to evil eats away at the very foundations of your convictions. Evil poisons, evil kills, evil undermines.

And listen to this. The worst form of wickedness in the world...what is it?...you say, well it's mass murder like Jeffrey Dalhmer(?), cannibalism. No. You say it's...it's homosexuality. No. You say it's infanticide, killing your children. No. The worst form of wickedness in the world is the perversion of God's truth. That's the worst because once you've perverted God's truth then you cannot anymore sit in judgment on behavior. The perversion of the truth of God is the most severe wickedness in the world. Spiritual lies are worse than anything else. False teachers, therefore, are the greatest of Satan's agents and the perpetrators of the severest crimes on the face of the earth. We're very concerned to mow down the bank robbers, and rightly so. We're very concerned to execute the multiple murderers. We're very concerned to put the thieves and crooks in jail. And we let the liars run rampant through our culture, destroying men's souls. And we even let them run loose in the church and never call them to question and measure them against the Word of God. This is a deadly disregard.

Now, that then is the intent of the text that we have to deal with this issue. Just a couple of questions in our time remaining to put us in touch with where we are. Why is there such a lack of discernment? Why is this the case? And maybe I'll try to answer a couple of these questions, that's all I'll have time for. But why is there such a lack of discernment? And the answer, first of all, is because of...I'll give you several answers...a weakening of doctrinal clarity we'll call it, a disinterest in doctrine. I mean, this is a monumental triumph for Satan and he's done it in a very deceptive way. He's created a movement, see if I can articulate this as simply, he's created a movement which seeks to know God and to come to God and ascend to God through experience and intuition, largely within the Charismatic Movement, but it goes beyond that. And there are some who would be in the Charismatic Movement of whom this would not be precisely true, but largely it's in that charismatic sort of Holy Spirit movement. This is a movement that wants to know God and like Eve wants to get close to God in ascend to God and come to God but does not want anyone testing its theology. Doesn't want to be measured against the Word of God. Doesn't want to be held to precise biblical definitions that threatens its experiential exercise.

Now this movement has swept through the church like a prairie fire and has created the tolerances that are now there. To stand against that is to be divisive and unloving, to be condemned and criticized. To take hold on firm biblical doctrine, to teach with precision is to be a hair-splitter, a heresy hunter lacking affection because the norm today is to graze sort of lazily over the surface of Scripture, come to your own conclusions and then sort of vault through your own intuitions and experiences into the presence of God. Same old promise, you can be like God and here's the path, here's how. You just float up there through your ecstasies, through your experiences. Someone comes along and wants to define those according to the Word of God, they're a threat. This is a...this is a serious, serious issue in the church because all spiritual issues must be measured against the Word of God, all of them. Not against some late revelation, some word from the Lord, some divine intervention, some message from an angel or whatever, but from the Word of God. And where you have this

tolerance, where you have people who don't want to be tested, they push doctrine aside, they have created the environment of intolerance. I don't say that in any other context, certainly not in a context of unkindness but in any other context than to let you know that this is why it's happened. Because as we have been forced to embrace everybody and it's continuing and continuing where we're being forced to embrace Catholicism in evangelicalism and forced to embrace... Did you hear Billy Graham, for example, the other night in his interview with Larry King say...he asked him, "How do you feel about the Mormons?" And he said, "I feel great, I feel fine, feel wonderful about the Mormons. Let's just certainly not say anything that might make a Mormon feel they were lost." Amazing. It just gets wider and wider and wider and you cannot introduce precise doctrine into that without being the enemy of that movement. And here we are in the middle of it.

He asked him further, "What do you think about the Jews?"

"Oh great, wonderful. I spoke there, and this and that, and you know that's wonderful, that's great."

That kind of latitude, that kind of acceptance is obviously damning and frightening to me and to anyone who is committed to the Word of God. But that's the mood we live in. So I guess maybe in a sense I'm arming you because you probably have defend me a lot. You... I know some people have said to me, "You know, I spend a lot of time telling people why I would go to your church when you're such a hard-nose guy and..." But it's not that my nose is hard, you know, that's not the issue. The issue is that I have a passion for the truth and I believe that I'm accountable to God for the truth. And more than that, it's not that I'm trying to make sure I cover my own backside, it's that I have a high trust, what Paul had, was a godly jealousy for the people of God that they might go from being espoused to Christ to becoming a pure virgin at the end when they meet their bridegroom. You want to keep them in the flow of the truth. You know, it's not easy to always dig into the Scripture and so it would be a lot easier, I mean, I've got enough sort of glib in me to wing it. I mean, I did it through my academic career in all my speech classes, but this is a different thing here...this is a different thing, this is not me to you, this is God to you through me, so you've got to get it right. But this disinterest in doctrine is what has brought the church to the place that it's at right now.

And at the same time the deception is of Satan is that, you know, we're all getting closer to God in the process. That's not true. That's sad. The cry is doctrine divides, and it does, it divides truth from error and we ought to be willing to pay that price. We certainly can't roll over and let error take the day like it has. It's amazing...amazing how Satan has succeeded.

Let me just share one other thought with you and this is an important thing to say. A second reason why, and it's obvious, why discernment is fading fast in the church is because of inadequate interpretation of Scripture...a failure to interpret the Bible. We could talk about other things, a preoccupation with image, an unwillingness to be antithetical, things like that. But I think it's most important simply to say this, there's no longer a real interest in interpreting the Bible accurately. First

of all, there are people, you know, who just get into these spiritual euphorias and say, "Lord, tell me what this means," you know, that kind of thing. But there just doesn't seem to be the interest in the hard work in interpreting Scripture, and it is hard work.

We've been hearing lately about some people saying, "Well the best kind of churches are cell churches where the church is in the home." Let me tell you something. I don't believe that for a minute. A home is a home and a church is a church and the two aren't the same. They are two different institutions created by God. And a home operates with the leadership of a father and the support of a mother. And a church operates under gifted, godly trained men who can accurately handle the Word of God and not every father can do that. And to think they can is to disdain God's design for the church. The church is distinct.

What you want in a church is men who can handle the Word of God, who can properly interpret the Scripture. That is the compelling issue that should occur in a church. And that takes time and training and effort. It doesn't just happen by sort of default. You just don't float around somehow come to the right conclusions. Men need to be carefully trained. That's clear to us in the Scripture I want to draw you to. Second Timothy 2:15, I commented on it and I'll close our message this morning, I commented on it earlier.

Second Timothy 2:15, actually we could start in verse 14, you'll get the picture here. Paul says to Timothy, "Remind them of these things," he's been talking about some other issues. Then he says, "Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers." He says...Look, don't just get together and pool your ignorance, don't just get together and hash around and think you can come up with what's right. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth." Get in there and cut it straight, the handling accurately means to cut straight, cut it straight like you were cutting a pattern to put something together. In Paul's case he made tents. To make a tent you had to cut the pieces right or the whole wouldn't come together when you stitched it. So cut the parts right or you have reason to be ashamed.

The point is that it takes diligent effort, demanding effort, as he says earlier in his epistle to Timothy, the elders who, or pastors who work hard in the Word and doctrine are worthy of double honor. It's the hardest work there is, folks, to get God's Word and get it right. It takes the cleansing of the heart and the clarity of the mind and the labor of the physical stamina as well. But he says you need to handle it accurately. And here's why. Verse 16, "Worldly empty talk leads to further ungodliness, spreads like gangrene." And then he talks about Hymenaeus and Philetus who have gone astray from the truth, who messed up the doctrine of the resurrection and they upset the faith of some. So what happens when you don't handle the Word accurately is you get just plain empty talk, you get ungodliness, you get ungodliness and empty talk spreading like gangrene, people go astray from the truth and their faith is upset.

Now the remedy for that is diligent, faithful study of the Word of God. When that doesn't exist, when people are more interested in entertainment, when the pastor is supposed to be a comedian and a story teller and not an expositor of Scripture, people are exposed to all kinds of error, all kinds of error, they go astray. And that was Paul's concern.

In 2 Corinthians 11 he was concerned that they were going to go astray, that they're going to wander off into that gangrenous kind of error that would upset their faith and lead them astray and cut them off from blessing and the joy of obedience to the truth of God. Whether failing to interpret Scripture accurately, whether being preoccupied with your image and so wanting to say to people what they want to hear, whether disdaining doctrine or being unclear in it, all of those things lead to an absence of discernment. And we have those things escalating at a rapid level. Even on the seminary level there's a disinterest in the teaching men to be expositors of Scripture, which is unthinkable to me...but it is the case today. So as I said, the worse the situation gets the less regard we have for the only remedy. When the disease gets worse and you disdain the cure, you have a severe epidemic, obviously. And that's what we have in the church. So as a church if we're going to be a true church, one of the primary functions this church has in your life and at what ever extent God allows is to provide substance of truth so that people can be discerning because we have a godly jealousy for them lest they would be deceived by Satan and led astray the way he was.

Now tonight I'm going to tell you how to be a discerning person. A few weeks from now I'm going to do a series on how to study the Bible, take you through some practical ways to actually interpret the Scripture, but tonight we'll kind of start a little bit down that path and I'll talk to you about the practical steps to becoming a discerning person, knowing how to be a Berean and search the Scriptures and see if these things are so. Let's pray.

Father, we know the promise of the Apostle John in his epistle who said that we don't need the world to teach us because we have an anointing from God, and we thank You that we not only have the Word but we have the Holy Spirit and with diligent pursuit of the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit we can know the truth. We thank You, Lord, that Your saints through the years have been faithful, there's always been a remnant, there's always been a core, there's always been a mainstream of Your people who understood Your Word. And we certainly thank You that we stand in that group and that we're a part of those who are committed to Your truth.

We pray for Your church, Lord, for this people, for the church beyond our walls that You would grant discernment and clarity of understanding that there might be a turning back from this diffidence toward doctrine, this disdain of precision and there might be a desire to be precise and accurate in the handling of the Word of God and there might be a concern to rightly divide the truth and to search it out carefully and thoughtfully so that we rightfully represent what it is that You've said. And in so doing we become strong in the Word and therefore overcome the evil one who comes to us with

deception.

I thank You, Lord, for those mature saints who are not deceived because they're strong in the Word, it abides in them and they have found strength and conviction there. For the rest we pray that they would be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, but would grow to strength to be able to understand the Word and to pass it on with accuracy, that we might all live in the blessing of the truth as we apply it in our lives for our blessing and Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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