

Principles for Discernment, Part 3

Selected Scriptures

TMC211

I suppose those of you who know me well know that I am consumed with the truth. If you ask what's most important to me, the answer is the truth of God. That's what drives me. That's what compels me. That's really what I live for is the truth, to know the truth and to proclaim the truth and to apply the truth and to defend the truth and guard the truth and raise up others who would have that same commitment to the truth of God.

And we've been talking about how important it is if we're going to represent the truth, which is so precious to God, that we understand discernment, that we be able to discern the truth. Absolutely critical.

Just by way of introduction, this morning, take you back to 2 Timothy chapter 2 for a moment and just give you a little bit of historical perspective. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 Paul says in verse 15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman, a craftsman who doesn't need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth."

There you have a title for Scripture, The Word of Truth. That's what Scripture is, it is the truth, it is God's truth. It is the most important thing in the universe, the truth of God. It is the truth of God that saves. It is the truth of God that justifies, that sanctifies and that gives the hope of glory. It is on the basis of the truth of God that we know what is reality about man, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, redemption and everything else that matters. And so it is critical that we handle accurately the Word of Truth, that we not be ashamed of ourselves for an inaccurate handling of God's truth. We need to present ourselves to God as craftsmen who have handled accurately His Truth.

This is particularly compelling if you go to chapter 3 verse 1 because the Apostle Paul says, "Realize this, that in the last days difficult times...the NAS says, some translations say dangerous seasons...will come." It is essential to handle the truth accurately because we will live in dangerous seasons. The word "times" here is not chronos, not clock time, it's kairos, it is epochs, movements. The word "dangerous" is just that, difficult, dangerous, deadly, threatening. It is critical for us to handle the Word accurately because we are living in dangerous times. And the greatest spiritual danger that exists in the world is the danger of deception. If the truth of God is the most important thing, then anything that assaults the truth of God is the most severe danger. Paul then is warning Timothy about his calling to know the truth, and over in chapter 4 verse 2, to preach the truth because of the danger of the seasons, dangerous epochs.

Down in verse 13 of chapter 3 it says, "Evil men and imposters," and again here's the idea of deception, imposters, false teachers, false prophets who misrepresent the truth, they will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. In other words, as the last days progress, deception will increase. Now the last days of verse 1 refers to the messianic time that began when

Jesus arrived. I'm going to address that some on Sunday night. But the last days began when Jesus came, the messianic era. Been going on for two thousand years and we're closer to the end of the last days than we've ever been. But Paul says, "In these last days that were initiated by the arrival of Messiah, there is going to be an increase in deception because the truth has landed fully in Jesus Christ." The Old Testament didn't give us the full truth. The Old Testament revelation was progressive. It didn't go from error to truth, it went from incompleteness to completeness and if all you had was Genesis to Malachi, you have an incomplete revelation. That's why the writer of Hebrews says that the Old Testament saints could not be perfected without us who are living in this era of the revelation of the mysteries of the New Testament.

And so, with the final arrival of the full truth in Jesus Christ, there is an escalation of deception to assault that truth. Those dangerous epochs come in these last days. And according to verse 13, they get worse and worse and worse as deception increases. Safe to say then that we live today in the most dangerous time in the history of the world, the most dangerous season in the history of the human race. The truth is under greater assault, more sophisticated assault, more diverse assault than it has ever been.

Just one illustration of that. When I was in my college days and my seminary days, I was exposed to theological liberalism. The big attack of theological liberalism was on the deity of Jesus Christ. They came along and said Jesus is not God and they said that He was either a man or an angel or even a figment of historical imagination, etc., but not God. And the liberals made the all-out assault on Jesus Christ.

Then came the mystical sort of Charismatic Movement that began to attack the Holy Spirit and redefine the Holy Spirit as if He was a little genie and you rubbed your bottle and He jumped out and did all kinds of miracles all over the place and gave you anything you wanted. There was an assault on the Holy Spirit. I don't now that I ever anticipated that finally the assault would get to God, but here we are really for the first time within the framework of what is called Christianity and evangelicalism with a massive attack on the nature of God framed up under the openness of God. It basically says God does not control what happens in the future, God doesn't...does not only control it, He doesn't even know what's going to happen until it happens. He's just trying to figure out how to react just the way we are. This is an assault on the nature of God, a blasphemous one at that.

So here is a new epoch that we didn't deal with a few years ago. The point being, we just keep accumulating these massive, dangerous epochs that threaten the truth. And the sad part is at the time when they are most formidable, most highly developed and most of them have been accumulated, the church is weaker than its ever been, preaching is weaker than its ever been. Evangelical Christianity is more compromising than its ever been. And we're moving fast to eliminate theology and Bible exposition from the pulpits as rapidly as possible. Christian colleges are weaker than they've been. Christian seminaries are weaker than they've been. And it's not the time for weakness.

If you go back in history and talk about those dangerous epochs, you would have to start with the dangerous epoch of Sacramentalism starting with the Holy Roman Empire in the fourth century and developing right up to the Reformation, over a thousand years of Sacramentalism, the Roman Catholic system and the Eastern Orthodox system where the church replaces Christ. The Church becomes a surrogate Christ. You attach to the system but never to Christ. You're fed by the system. Salvation is by automatic ritual and routine. And you have a mass of people who call themselves

Christians but don't know Christ at all. The power of Sacramentalism for a moment was assaulted and attacked in the Reformation, but it survived and now it's more powerful than ever. And you have leading evangelicals coming along and saying that the Pope is a wonderful Christian brother. They have literally bought the lies and deceptions of Sacramentalism. Dangerous stuff and the evangelical world today is unwilling to call Sacramentalism what it is, a false system.

Out of the Reformation, by the time you're moving into the seventeenth and eighteenth century, a second dangerous season comes called Rationalism. Out of the enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Renaissance, man finds his own mind after having literally been held captive to Sacramentalism, held in abysmal ignorance under the Roman Catholic Church in which people were spoken to in a language, Latin, that they couldn't even understand. Their sort of mental release came in the great times of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution...Revolution. Gave birth to Humanism and Rationalism and man began to be enamored with his mind and Thomas Paine writes *The Age of Reason*, half of it debunks the Bible, and the other half postulates the human brain as the ultimate authority in the universe. And so Rationalism is born. It goes back to the Bible and it just massacres the Bible, removing anything that's not rational which is everything that's divine and supernatural. And out of Rationalism comes the worship of the human mind, Liberalism, Theological Liberalism, Neo-Orthodoxy, Critical Theory that emasculates the Bible, and so forth. That dangerous season is still with us today as Liberalism pervades and theology as Humanism dominates education, as Atheism is still a factor in our world.

Out of that period comes another kind of ism, Orthodoxy, dead, cold, Orthodoxy, churches that are historic, they have connections to Luther, they have connections to Calvin, but they are as dead as a proverbial doornail. And then you have the dangerous season of Politicism in Europe where the church is politicized, where it marries the government and even in a most bizarre fashion Hitler realizes that if he's going to bring about his great Nazi Empire and conquer the world, he's going to have to embrace Christianity and become united with Christianity. And so Hitler develops what was called The German Christian Faith Movement. Hitler embraces a strip of denuded kind of Christianity, equates Nazism with true Christianity, takes everything out of the Bible that's positive about Jewish people and then sets out to use Christianity as a way to massacre the Jews. In the midst of that, people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer raise a protest and they too are martyred.

Politicism is any effort to politicize Christianity for any political means. Clear it's social gospel, reconstructionism, liberation theology and even contemporary quote/unquote evangelical moralism.

Then you have coming into the 1950's, ecumenism which says let's all get together. Can't we all just get along? And let's not make doctrine an issue. Let's just love each other and you have a new hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible, the Jesus ethic. And if something in the Bible doesn't seem to square with what we think Jesus would think, then we throw it out. We all believe that Jesus was this gentle, meek, loving kind of syrupy guy who floated around patting babies on the head and being nice to old ladies. And therefore, we've got to get rid of all the wrath, and all the judgment, and all the threats, and etc., that are in the Bible. Anything that divides or is unkind and so ecumenism eliminates doctrine for the sake of some kind of congeniality. Dangerous seasons.

And by the way, they didn't go away. We still have Sacramentalism, it's with us. We still have Rationalism, it's with us. We still have dead Orthodoxy, it's still with us. We still have the politicizing of Scripture and the politicizing of Christianity. We still have ecumenism. In fact, it's more alive than evangelicalism than it's ever been in my lifetime.

And then in the 1960's came another dangerous epoch, Experientialism. It started in Van Nuys, California in an Episcopalian church. The Charismatic Movement as it is now known was really Experientialism. It said truth is discerned by intuition. Truth is discerned by experience, not accurate interpretation of the Scripture. Signs and wonders, visions, prophecies, voices from God will tell you the truth. Forget the Bible, set the Bible aside, trust your intuition, trust your feelings, trust your experiences. A dangerous epoch that stripped the Bible of its authority. I remember one leader I was dialoguing with said, "I really don't care what the Bible says, I know what Jesus told me."

It was the 1980's when another dangerous epoch came into the church, the dangerous epoch of Subjectivism...Subjectivism. This is when the church bought psychology and the church turned in on itself in to sort of Narcissistic navel watching, looking for its own self-esteem and trying to solve all its own anxieties and pains. Theology was redefined as meeting people's felt needs. Psychology was a dangerous epoch in the church. It had a terribly devastating effect on biblical preaching where once the Bible was peached in pulpits, then psychology took over. It affected, as we all know, counseling and people were psychologized rather than theologized in dealing with the issues of life. Subjectivism is still there, still has a reigning place in the church.

In the nineties came mysticism, belief in everything. The loss of the centrality of Scriptures...then in the 1990's, also...by the way, they're coming faster now because as media capability increases, movements come. It used to take a thousand years and then a few hundred years, and now they come in about two or three years because of the media opportunity to bring everybody under the banner of new thinking. But in the nineties came Pragmatism is the view that the church ought to do whatever people want it to do. And Robert Schuller said, "You want to start a church? Survey your neighborhood, find out what they want, and give it to them."

I remember I was at a Christian National Religious Broadcasters Convention and Robert Schuller gave a message to the whole convention, that's what he said. "If you want to know how to run the church, survey the neighborhood, find out what everybody wants and then give that to them and they'll come." And everybody stood up and clapped at the end of his thing, except myself and a couple of other guys who were standing there. And I think we were pretty obviously not standing up, at least to those around us. And that was followed by a panel discussion. And I happened to be on the panel with the same people. And the first question...the first question that the moderator of the panel asked was, because it came from the audience, "John, what did you think of what Dr. Schuller said and be to the point?"

So I said, "Well, I disagree...I disagree completely. If you want to know how to run a church, read the New Testament and do what God said." Chuck Swindoll was sitting next to me, just kind of shaking his head and, "Why don't you tell them what you really feel, John?" He said. I said, "I'm trying, Chuck, do you agree?" "Yeah, I agree."

If you want to know how to run a church, read the New Testament. It's not about Pragmatism, it's not about what people want or what works. Pragmatism says that preaching is a pony-express method of delivery in a high-tech age, but it's still the preaching of the cross that God calls for.

That was in the 1990's, also Syncretism came or Inclusivism, if you want, that's the latest dangerous system, where everybody's going to go to heaven even if they never heard the gospel, never

believed the gospel. You have books being written to advocate that coming out at a rapid-fire rate. Places that shock me like Moody Press publishing a book that says, "People who have never heard of Jesus, never heard of a Bible are going to go to heaven because they believe in a Creator." Amazing. These are dangerous seasons bottom line.

And in dangerous seasons, more dangerous than they've ever been, the truth is hanging perilously threatened. "This is the time for people...back to chapter 2 verse 15...to be diligent to present themselves approved to God as craftsmen needing not to be ashamed because they handle accurately the Word of Truth." That's a matter of interpretation. And then over in chapter 4 verse 2, "Preach that truth." It's not only how you handle it, it's how you proclaim it. And he says in verse 2 of chapter 4, "Be ready in season and out of season."

The bottom line is, it may not always be popular. There will be a season when it's popular, there will be a season when it's not. I've lived long enough to be through...have gone through that. When I came to Grace Church many years ago, thirty-some years ago, preaching of the Bible was really popular and I was popular because I was a Bible teacher and people flooded to the church and people wanted me to speak here and speak there. And publishers would call me and say, "You know we want one of your books, we don't care what it's about, just write us a book and give it to us. And we just want Bible teaching. There's a tremendous appetite for Bible teaching." And I was invited here and there and everywhere to speak. And I haven't changed. I'm doing the same thing I've always done.

And I'm a problem now...I'm a real problem. I'm a dinosaur. I'm a problem. People don't want me anymore at their conferences because I cause problems. I'm not saying anything different. I could send to some conferences I used to speak at an old tape that I gave when I was there and it would now be a problem. These are really dangerous seasons.

The question is, what are we going to do? We going to do what the Scripture tells us to do? This is not a time for weak people and weak churches preaching weak messages. Too dangerous a time.

Well all of that to say this is a time for discernment. Now let's go back to our text. That was just an introduction. But I think it tells you where I'm going here. Back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, just a couple of looks at the verses we've been using in these days. Verse 20, "Do not despise propheteos, do not despise preaching. Don't look down on preaching. I could preach a message on "don't look down on preaching," because today preaching is looked down on. Don't look down on preaching but don't just accept everything, examine everything carefully, do that dokimazo, that assessment, and whatever is good, hold on to it and whatever is evil, shun it. You have to be discerning. You have to be discerning

Now we talked Monday and Wednesday about why the church is undiscerning and I gave you some reasons just kind of assessing things. Now I want to talk about the positive side of this. What is discernment? What is it?

Simply this, discernment is the skill in distinguishing truth from error...and here's the more important part maybe...and from half truth. Discernment is the skill in distinguishing truth from error and from half truth. It is a facility to distinguish and therefore I told you Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "When the church loses its willingness to engage itself in such a distinction and to engage in the polemics of

argument to save the truth, the church will go out of existence.” You must guard the truth, Paul says to Timothy. You must guard the truth, that is your responsibility, to be a guardian of it. Second Timothy 1:14, “Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you.” The treasure, of course, is the truth which had been committed to him. That guardianship is also noted a couple of other times as Paul writes to Timothy in chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you and don’t fall prey to knowledge falsely so-called.”

So discernment again is the skill in distinguishing truth from error and from half-truth. Two principle terms are used in the Bible for discernment. The Hebrew word bin and the Greek word diakrino. Both in etymology and usage are similar. The Hebrew word bin is used about 250 times in the Old Testament. It has been translated in various ways, understand, discern, distinguish. And it is related...this is a good thought to keep in mind...it is related to a Hebrew noun bayin which means space between something. It means literally an interval. The preposition ben another form of that same root means between. It is the ability to put space between two things. That is, to not let them blur together, to be distinctive. The process by which you come to separate things that differ. Discernment is then reaching understanding and knowledge of the truth by a process of separation. Thinking Christians know how to separate.

To make a space between the thoughts and ways of God and the world, between a true interpretation of Scripture and a false one. The Greek term, diakrino is the same thing, it means to separate used, for example, in Matthew 16:23...16:2 and 3 that I read you when we first started, being able to discriminate between different situations. The Pharisees looked up in the sky and they made a discrimination or a distinction between the weather based upon what they saw. Spiritual discernment then is the ability to distinguish God's truth from everything else. The ability to distinguish God's truth from everything else.

Let me tell you something, there's no greater way to honor God than to make that distinction because God is honored when His Word is believed. When you don't get it right, God is dishonored. To discern the truth of God is critical, absolutely critical. That's why there's so much instruction in the New Testament about the mind because this is a mental process, this is a cognitive process. This doesn't happen in your upper abdominal area. How are you going to be conformed to this world by not being, Romans 12:2, to transform by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is.

If you want to know what God approves and what God wills and what God has said, you have to have your mind renewed, otherwise you're just going to fall victim to the thinking of that which dominates the society around you. Listen to Philippians 1:9. “I pray that your love may abound still more and more.” That's good, we want you to love. “But in real knowledge,” not false knowledge, “real knowledge,” and I love this, “and in all discernment.” Love and truth in perfect balance. Love and truth in perfect balance. Colossians 1:9 and 10, essentially the same thing, “I pray for you that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And the result is, you'll walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Truth is critical to the preservation of that truth for the next generation. It's also critical for your testimony and your witness. It's also critical for your own spiritual life.

Well that brings us to the last point and just want to give you some things to think about. How can I become a discerning person? How can I become a discerning person?

Number one, desire...desire. How badly do you want it? How important is it to you? Cause this is what separates, if you will, the men from the boys. Proverbs 2...look at Proverbs 2. Proverbs is all about wisdom, it's all about understanding, it's all about discernment, it's all about knowing the mind of God, the truth of God. It's all about loving knowledge, the knowledge of God. And so in chapter 2 verse 1, "My son, if you will receive My sayings and treasure My commandments within you, if you really want to know what I'm saying, then make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding." In other words, something's got to happen in you that says I want to know God's truth. I want to know it that I can honor Him by the belief in it. I want to know it so that I can proclaim it accurately. I want to know it so it will have an impact on my life.

I know you probably often think that God is pleased when you do what is right. And He is. God is pleased when you obey Him. God is equally pleased when you understand His truth. And the more of it you understand, the more pleased He is.

Now how are you going to...how are you going to get to the point of real discernment? Verse 3, you start by listening to the truth, that is exposing yourself to the Word of God, read, preached, taught. But look at verse 3, you want discernment? "Then cry for discernment. Lift your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God."

How badly do you have to want it? You have to want it more than you want anything else. Now it's pretty typical for kids to go to college with a view to getting silver, right? You want a job, we understand that. You'll even make a great investment to prepare yourself so that you can have a career and prosper. You might even commit yourself to searching for hidden treasure, trying to figure out ways to get well. Amazing what people will do.

What level of passion do you have toward discernment? Where does that fit into the scheme of things? Some of you are trying to achieve things scholastically, achieve things musically and achieve things economically, achieve things athletically. I mean, how much do you cry for discernment? How important is it for you? How much does it drive you? Because if it doesn't, you're not going to get there.

I mean, it's the same old thing. If you don't run that race, you can't win it. If you don't pursue that goal, you can't get it. If you're content with a minimal knowledge of truth, if you're content with a kind of sloppy theology, if you're content not to pursue the deep things of God and the glories of His truth, then I promise you, you're not going to get them because they're not sitting on the surface.

There's a great chapter in Job chapter 28 which...we can't read the whole chapter, but just a couple of comments about it. You can read it on your own. It points out, Job 28, "There's a mine for silver, a place where they refine gold, iron is taken from the dust, from rock copper is smelted." It's kind of interesting to think about the fact that Job is probably written in the patriarchal age, maybe the first book in the Bible, so you're way, way back in early human history and they already had silver mines, they already had gold mines, they already had iron ore, they were already smelting copper out of the rock. I mean, you're talking about...do you think man is smarter today than he was then? Wrong. We're on the decline. "And in order to mine the treasures that God had placed in the earth, man put an end to darkness. That is, he dug down into the earth to reach these things and literally brought the

light down to the farthest limit. He sank a shaft, amazing, what kind of drill did they use to sink shafts into the rock? Forgotten by the foot and they hang and swing to and fro far from men.” They put a shaft in the ground in Job's day and they sent people down there in some kind of an elevator contraption and they were swinging around down there trying to find whatever was there. They brought up...this is amazing...”They brought up sapphires” in verse 6, “and gold. They went to places where the bird of prey doesn't even know. The falcon's eye has never caught sight of it.” And they used the falcon as an illustration because they have such incredible sight. The falcon never saw this. No proud beast ever trod in that area. Verse 9, “Overturn the mountains...” how do you overturn the mountain at its base? You have to do dynamite to do that. Are we saying that in Job's day they had that kind of sophisticated ability to overturn mountains? That's what it says. “They cut channels through the rocks. They dammed up the streams.”

What are they doing? Mining for gold, all this in the primitive time of Job but they can do all of that but verse 12 says, “Where can wisdom be found?” Where can wisdom be found? Where's the place of understanding? Man doesn't know its value. It's not in the land of the living. The deep says, the ocean says you're not going to find it in me. The sea says, not with me. Pure gold can't buy it. Silver can't get it. The gold of Ophir can't get it. Precious onyx, sapphires, gold, glass can't equal it. Coral, crystal, topaz, it goes on. You can find...man has incredible, incredible genius to find all of this stuff but he can't find wisdom. The reason he can't find wisdom is because he doesn't look where it is, in the Word of God.

Verse 23, “God understands its way; He knows its place.” Verse 28, “Behold the fear of the Lord.” That's wisdom. Now if you want wisdom the way people want gold and silver and sapphires, if you want to give your life to the pursuit of wisdom, then you'll be discerning...then you'll be discerning. And your discernment will lead to greater worship because you won't be worshiping out of a shallow understanding of God, but a full and rich one. It will give greater impact to your life and testimony because you'll bring the Word of God, the truth of God to bear upon every circumstance in the lives of people you influence. It will make you a more effective, obviously, teacher and preacher if that's what God calls you to do. And it will profoundly enrich your own life because living in the truth, living out the truth brings the flood of the blessing of God upon your life.

That's why I've said this through the years, it's so important to protect the doctrine of Scripture because if you ever equivocate on the veracity and authenticity and authority and inerrancy of Scripture, you've just cut yourself off from an absolute source of wisdom.

So, you start at that point. Let me give you a second point. First you want to desire it. You have to have that desire in your heart, ask God to grant you that desire. And that takes me to the second point, prayer...prayer. James 1:5, “Any of you lacks wisdom, let him...what?...what does it say?...ask God who gives to all men generously without reproach and it will be given to him. But don't ask in faith doubting or you'll be like the sea, driven and tossed, with full confidence that God is the source of wisdom.” It starts with a passion in your heart. And I don't know, I grew up, you know, as an athlete. In high school, I didn't take my education seriously at all, it was just a way to stay eligible to play. I came into my college days and I was involved in athletics and...but there was in my heart in my days in college even though I was consumed with so many activities and being involved in leadership and a lot of other things, there was this growing passion to know the truth. In fact, I had a hard time having daily devotion because people would say to me, “You know, read the Bible fifteen minutes a day, read the Bible a half an hour a day and say a little prayer, it's really important.” That was the most frustrating thing I did because I'd read it and I'd say, “I don't understand that.” And then

when I shut the Bible and went away, I was frustrated because I didn't understand what I just read.

So if you mean by daily devotional reading the Bible and not understanding it, that's not helpful. I found out, however, as I read it more and more and more, it began to be clear to me. But the Lord started developing in me a passion for the truth and I started trying to feed that development by my own prayer. "Lord, I want to understand Your Word." I never went to seminary, in all honesty, I never went to seminary to be made into a preacher. I never went to seminary to be made into a pastor. I went to seminary because I was frustrated because I didn't have the tools to interpret the Word of God and I had such a desire to know His truth. And that's never changed. It's a matter of prayer. It's a matter of passion.

Thirdly, it's a matter of pattern. You need an example. So hang around people who have discernment. That's one of the great realities of being here. Hang around people who have discernment. Just like a leech, you know, suck everything you can get out of them. Now, today, as always, according to 1 Corinthians 12:10, there's a gift of discernment. First Corinthians 12:10 talks about the gift of discernment. The gift of discernment is related, I believe, to an understanding of Scripture which is how you become discerning. This gift becomes a watchdog gift for the church, though it may have in the early church had some element of being able to discern false spirits. False spirits could easily be discerned by anybody because they spoke false and not the truth. Hang around people who have discernment, people who know how to answer heresies and hypocrisies, who know how to identify error, who understand the subtleties. This is one of the great experiences of your life is to be in an environment here with those kinds of people all around you. These people are the watchmen for the church. They are your teachers.

Another thing to do, and this fits right into it, is follow the example of mature Christians. Follow the example of mature Christians. The writer of Hebrews, and this without going into a lot of detail, in chapter 5 of Hebrews and the last little verse there, "Solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to discern." Find mature people who have been around a while and who have their senses trained to be discerning. Pastors, youth pastors, faculty members, sit under discerning people. Really important when you choose a church, not just now but throughout your life, find those people who demonstrate maturity in discernment. Make them your pattern.

So you start with asking God to give you the passion, asking God to give you the desire, the hunger for the truth. You support that constantly in prayer, asking God to show you the truth, to reveal the wisdom to you as you study His Word. Find those who are gifted in that area who are mature, follow them.

And then I think just one other thing has to be said and that is this, depend upon the Holy Spirit. Depend upon the Holy Spirit. First John 2, this verse I know you know, verse 20, "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know. I have not written to you because you don't know the truth but because you do know it and because no lie is of the truth."

The reason you know the truth, he says, is because you have an anointing from the Holy One. The anointing is the Holy Spirit. Verse 27, "You received from Him the anointing who abides in you so you don't have any need for human teachers, but as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie, you abide in Him."

So here again, the truth contrasted to the lie, the truth teacher, the anointing, the Holy Spirit given to you at the time of your salvation. You have a resident truth teacher. How wonderful is that? You have a permanent faculty member, more astute than all of us combined, infinitely so. And that truth teacher dwells in you and promises to disclose to you the truth of God as you expose yourself to the written Word.

And that takes me to the last point. Diligently study Scripture. You have to end up here, folks. Diligently study Scripture. Like in Acts 17 the Bereans who search the Scripture to see if these things were so, read Psalm 19 and you're going to find there a man, David, who loved the Scripture. All through Psalm 19, all hundred and seventy-six verses he pours out this love for the truth which compelled his heart, just compelled his heart.

As you study the Word of God, as you expose yourself to the Word of God, prayerfully, passionately, dependent on the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, discernment will develop. And then you find those who demonstrate maturity and have experienced through the years of practice who are the models of that discernment and make those people your spiritual heroes. Don't make the stylized people your heroes, make the discerning people. Those who have the deep and wide and broad and high grasp of divine truth, they're your heroes. I'm afraid it's like our world around us, many young Christians heroes are in the music field or sort of the Christian pop culture field. Make the heroes the ones who have the most discernment. And God will be blessed and honored by your faithfulness to His truth, you will be able to worship Him in the highest and purest form because the more you know about Him, the more glorious He is. The more of His truth you know, the greater will be your worship, the greater will be your ministry, your witness and the greater joy and blessing will come to your life as you live out that truth.

So maybe to end, look at Philippians 1. I mentioned it a minute ago. But let me just make this my prayer for you. Philippians 1:9, "This I pray that your love may abound still more." I don't want to make this love for truth become hard-hearted, or hard headed. Paul didn't either. He says, "No, I want your love to abound still more and more. But I want that love to be the product of real knowledge and all discernment. And I'll tell you this. The more you know of God's truth, the more legitimately you love. The less you know of God's truth, the more superficially you love. So I want your love to abound still more and more but in real knowledge with all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, you can make the distinctions. And when you make the distinctions, here's the wonderful reality, you will be sincere, that is without hypocrisy, and blameless in your life until the day of Christ, the day the Lord comes for His own. I want your life to be without hypocrisy, sincere, without wax, no hypocrisy. I want it to be blameless until the day of Christ. And then in verse 11, "I want your life to be filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ and gives glory and praise to God."

I want you to live a life that praises God, a life that glorifies God, a life that honors Christ, the life that's fruitful, a life that's blameless, a life that's without hypocrisy because you can choose what is excellent because you have all discernment because you have real knowledge. You can go forward and backward through those verses. You're blessed, people are impacted, God is glorified when you are discerning.

Father, I pray that You will grant to us even as we said earlier from James that You would grant to us the wisdom that we need. May we not wait as if somehow that's going to occur in a vacuum, but may we know that the wisdom awaits us in the pages of Scripture as we faithfully pursue it, reading it

repeatedly, studying it, listening to it being taught, reading books that explain its meaning, following the example of those who are mature and have their senses heightened through practice to discern what is right and what is true. Give us the deep passion, give us an unending prayer for discernment that causes us to come before Your throne and plead and cry for discernment, wanting it more than silver, more than gold, more than anything, for then we will have the knowledge of God and we'll have an appropriate fear in the worship of You. I pray, Lord, that You will make us guardians of the truth as well as proclaimers of it, as well as living out that truth and enjoying all the fruits of righteousness which shall be to our own blessing in time and eternity and to your eternal praise. These things we ask in Your Son's name. Amen.

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