

Spiritual Discernment: Attaining Spiritual Discernment

by Stephen Kaung

Spiritual discernment is the ability to distinguish between the good and evil, true and false, and spiritual and natural, and it is a gift of God available to all believers.

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:14

Topics: "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spiritual exercise for believers. He compares the physical exercise done in the gymnasium to the spiritual exercise that believers should engage in. The world and everyday life are seen as the gymnasium where believers can exercise their spirits. The Holy Spirit is presented as the instructor who guides and teaches believers in their spiritual exercise. The speaker also highlights the need to listen to and exercise the conscience, as it helps in developing spiritual discernment. The sermon encourages believers to discipline their bodies and not be controlled by its passions, but rather be slaves to the righteousness of God. The overall message is that Christians should actively engage in spiritual exercises to grow in their knowledge of God and increase their spiritual discernment.

Transcript

I would like to read the same scriptures that we read last, yesterday morning. 1 Corinthians chapter 2, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 14 and 15. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But the spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned of no one. The letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, verses 9, 10 and 11. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more, in full knowledge and all intelligence, or all spiritual discernment.

That ye may judge of and approve the things that are more excellent. In order that ye may be pure and without offense for Christ's sake, being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise. We are fellowshiping on this matter of spiritual discernment.

I hope that to everyone, we sense the desperate need of spiritual discernment. Because we are living in such a day, a day of great confusion, and we need spiritual discernment. That we may be able to distinguish between true and false, right and wrong, spiritual or natural, soulish or spiritual, God's will or man's idea.

We live in a world of great deception, and we need spiritual discernment to see through the counterfeit, the darkness that is around us. Spiritual discernment is necessary for us to live a life that is pleasing to God. That walks in the will of God.

So dear brothers and sisters, our burden is that in these last difficult days, God will grace us with spiritual discernment. We mentioned yesterday morning that spiritual discernment is not a natural endowment. You know, we are all made differently.

Some people are naturally endowed with more keenness of senses. They seem to be able to see things more clearly. But this is not what is meant by spiritual discernment.

Because spiritual discernment is not something natural. So, spiritual discernment is not the deep knowledge of the world. Some people have lots of worldly experiences.

And because of that, they seem to have a kind of perception that other people may not have. But brothers and sisters, this is not what we mean by spiritual discernment. As a matter of fact, the more deeply you are wise and prudent in the world, the less spiritual discernment you have.

You remember what our Lord Jesus said when He was rejected by Capernaum, Chorazin, and these places that He had worked many wonders and spoke many words. You remember our Lord Jesus? He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, I thank Thee because this is Thy good pleasure. Thou dost reveal Thyself to the babes, but to the wise and prudent Thou dost hide Thyself.

So, dear brothers and sisters, it is not worldly wisdom that we are talking about. Spiritual discernment is not psychic power. Especially in these last days, the enemy is trying to stir up psychic power.

But this is not what the Lord wants. It is something from God, something from the Holy Spirit, something that deep in our spirit we are given a discerning power. So, brothers and sisters, spiritual discernment is the spiritual ability to distinguish between the good and evil, to distinguish between true and false, to distinguish between flesh and spirit, between self and God, between what is of God and what is of man.

And that is a spiritual discernment. And that is something that we need very much in our days. Now, this morning, we would like to go a step further and to see how do we come to this spiritual discernment.

Now, unless you realize the need of it, and furthermore, you realize that you don't have it, as you should, then I think it is time for us to talk about how can we attain this spiritual discernment. But before we do that, I think we would like to clarify one thing. And that is, spiritual discernment is different from that spiritual gift you find in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 10.

Now, for the sake of the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the body, in different members of the body, by giving them different spiritual gifts. And one of the spiritual gifts is the discerning of spirits. Discerning of spirits is a gift, is a spiritual gift.

It is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. To some members of the body, the Holy Spirit gives such a gift that they are able to discern the spirits. Now, dear brothers and sisters, there are many spirits in the world, in the unseen world.

Not only the Spirit of God, not only the good angels, good spirits, but there are many angels who have rebelled against God. Evil spirits. So, we need to be able to discern whether it is God's Spirit or whether it is evil spirit.

And as our brothers have all mentioned, how Satan himself transforms himself as an angel of light. In other words, you find the evil spirit sometimes tries to imitate the Spirit of God. And that's the reason why we need the discerning of spirits.

This is given especially to some members of the body of Christ. Not all members of the body of Christ have such gift. I thank God because He does not give the same gift to everybody.

Because it shows us how we need one another. No one of us is perfect, complete, has every gift. If you do, you will not need your brother or sister anymore.

But God is after the body, not just an individual. We need one another. So that's the reason why you find God gives to some members the discerning of spirits.

Especially in the time of revivals. You know, when a revival comes, the Holy Spirit is working in a very prominent way. But when the Holy Spirit is working in such a manner, the evil spirit tries to confuse.

And they will come in and work very hard. That's the reason why, especially in revivals, when the manifestation of the Spirit is so prominent, you find all kinds of confusion begins to come in. It is the enemy trying to confuse, perplex people.

For instance, during the Welsh revival in 1904 and 5, if you know the history, you know that in Welsh there was a great revival. Many came to the Lord. And the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was clear.

But at the same time, the enemy came in and tried to imitate, counterfeit, and confuse people. And because of this, you find later on, Evan Roberts, in cooperation with Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis, they wrote that book called War on the Saints. Because that's the experience that Evan Roberts had during the Welsh revival.

And with the knowledge that Mrs. Penn-Lewis had, they wrote such a book that delivered many people who are in confusion and even in deception. So especially at a time when the Holy Spirit is very clearly manifested, we need those with the gifts of discerning of spirits. But spiritual discernment is different from the discerning of spirits.

Why? Because the discerning of spirit is a gift. And because it is a gift, the Holy Spirit just gives, not to all, but to some, according to His will. But spiritual discernment is not a gift.

It is grace. Brothers and sisters, because it is grace, it is for all. That's the difference between gift and grace.

Whenever you come to a matter of gift, you will find that some have, some don't. Some have this gift, some have other gifts. But of course, every member has a gift, at least, that we may function in the body of Christ, for the body of Christ.

But grace is impartial. Grace is universal. Grace is given to all.

Spiritual discernment is a grace. Not. That's the reason why it is open to all the brothers and sisters, to everyone.

It is open to you, it is open to me, it is open to all. That is spiritual discernment. In a sense, every believer has a measure of spiritual discernment.

It comes with life. When you believe in the Lord Jesus, you are born again. Born from above.

You receive a new life. The life of Christ. God's own life.

Now, with that life, you receive a certain measure of spiritual discernment. It comes with life. It comes with the quickening of your dead spirit.

You know, we were all created with a spirit, a soul, and a body. With the body, we have the world consciousness. We are aware of the world around us by our five senses.

With the soul, we are conscious of ourself because we think, we feel, we decide. And with our spirit, we should be conscious of God because God is the proper environment of our spirit. But unfortunately, because of sin.

The Lord's word to Adam is, you shall not eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die. Die on that very day.

Every moment. But we know Adam lived to over 900 years old, physically speaking. And he begot sons and daughters, solitarily speaking.

He was alive. But what was dead? The spirit was dead. When sin came in, the spirit was dead.

Now, it doesn't mean that the spirit as a created organ disappeared, annihilated. It's there. But the spirit is dead to its proper environment.

In other words, it has lost its contact with God. And that's the reason why you'll find before we were saved, we lost contact with God. God became an unknown to us.

People can communicate with evil spirit, but they cannot communicate with God. But thank God, when you believe in the Lord Jesus, you are born again. He that is born of the spirit is spirit.

He that is born of the Holy Spirit is the human. Your spirit was quickened into life. Renewed.

And not only you receive a new spirit, so your contact with God is instantly resumed. Calling out, Abba, Father. But the Holy Spirit came and dwelt in your new spirit.

You know, in Ezekiel we are told, God said, I will give you a new spirit and I will put my spirit into your spirit. So dear brothers and sisters, we who believe in the Lord Jesus, we receive a new life. The life of God.

The life of Jesus Christ. And at the same time, a new spirit with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And when that happened, you'll find a certain measure of spiritual discernment dwells in you.

You may not know about the Word of God much yet. You may be new. A new Christian.

But dear brothers and sisters, there is something in you that gives you a certain amount of spiritual discernment. It is the life in you. It is the Holy Spirit in you.

And that discernment does not come from outward observation or knowledge. It comes from your spirit. Several years ago, a man got saved.

He came from a heathen background. He did not know even the Word of God. He was newly saved.

But soundly saved. He went to Boston. He got to a meeting.

And he heard a message. Now remember, he was a new Christian. He didn't have much knowledge of the Scripture.

But when he was listening to the preacher, when the preacher said, We are God-men. Something within him said, No. It cannot be.

Now, he cannot explain it because he has no Scripture knowledge. But somehow he sensed something is not right. And later on, he said, He said to call a person a man of God, that's reasonable.

But to call a man God-man, that doesn't sound right. Now remember, this is a new Christian. He has no Scripture knowledge.

But there is a certain amount of spiritual discernment in that person. Our brother mentioned last night, 1 John, little children, babes in Christ, and in 1 John chapter 2, you'll find that the apostle John said to little children, You are living in the last hour, and the spirit of antichrist is everywhere. Now how are you going to live through such a world? Babes are easily misled.

They will be swayed by every wind of doctrine. When people come in with one doctrine, you are blown in that direction. And people come in with another doctrine, you are blown another direction.

Babes are easily swayed. Why? Because they do not have the right knowledge. But thank God, even babes in Christ, God has given provision to deliver us from deception.

Why? Because the anointing dwells in us. The Holy Spirit who dwells in us is the anointing. Why does He use the anointing? Because the anointing means that the ointment is softly, tenderly applied upon some wounds and make you feel.

That's the way the Holy Spirit works in our spirit. And He is there as our teacher, unfailing teacher. He will teach us in all things.

And remember, these words are spoken to little children. As little children in Christ. The Holy Spirit who dwells in us is teaching us incessantly, in everything, great and small.

And whatever He teaches is true. And is not a lie. You know, how can we know this is a lie or this is true? Sometimes lie looks very much like truth.

The Holy Spirit, He will teach you in great things and in small things. And whatever He teaches is true. It is not a lie.

And if you obey the teaching of the anointing, you abide in Christ. Brothers and sisters, that's the reason why you'll find even as little children bathe in Christ, God has already given us a provision. A certain amount of spiritual deservance.

Now, of course, being young, in spiritual things, you may be mistaken. And that's the reason in the same portion of Scripture, the Apostle John said, what you have heard from the beginning, if you keep what you have heard from the beginning, then you abide in God and you abide in Christ. In other words, because there is the possibility of being mistaken, therefore, you really need to go to the Word of... to check with the Word of God.

If you find it in the Word, or if you cannot find it, if it agrees with the Word, or it is opposite to the Word, contrary to the Word, then, with the leading of the Spirit within you, and with the Word of God before you, you are able to discern what is of God and what is not. Now, unfortunately, among God's people, there is a basic lack. After we are saved, we are not being taught of this inward way of life.

We are being led away from living an inner life, an inward way of life, that is, a life by listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, by having that inward relationship with God. We are led astray to the outward. We are being taught of many rules and regulations.

We are told that if we want to be a good Christian, what are the things that we should do, and what are the things that we should not do. And further than that, we ourselves make many laws and rules and regulations for ourselves. We all have our own standard of living a Christian life.

What a Christian life is and we make all kinds of rules and regulations for ourselves. We bind ourselves with outward laws and rules. Our walk is an outward walk, not an inward way.

And because of that, we neglect to hear the still, small voice. We do not have the habit. You know, there are spiritual habits we need to cultivate.

Just like with our physical life, there are certain habits, good habits, you need to develop. And as Christians, we need to develop certain spiritual habits. And if we don't develop these habits, then you'll find our spiritual senses are dormant, are not being used.

So dear brothers and sisters, it is very important that at the start of our Christian life, we need to realize what God has given to us. Life. A new life.

You know, spiritual discernment is a matter of life. It is not a matter of outside knowledge. Some people may have great knowledge, but they have little discernment.

Spiritual discernment is based on life. The life of Christ in you as manifested by the Holy Spirit. Now, that is the foundation of spiritual discernment.

So if you let this new life in you develop, grow, then your spiritual discernment also grows. If you neglect this inner life, then your spiritual discernment will not grow. You know, every life has its nature.

Our old life, that identical life in us, has its nature. And what is nature? It always goes in the direction of sin, of rebellion. That's the nature of human life.

That's the reason why a baby, the first word that he knows, and says no. That is the first indication of Adamic life. A life of rebellion.

To sin is natural. Not to sin is unnatural. Now, if you follow that natural life, if you develop according to the nature of that life, there is no reason to be surprised that you live such a corrupted, sinful life.

Because that's what it is. But dear brothers and sisters, God has given us a new life. It is God's uncreated life.

It is the life of Christ. It has been demonstrated on this earth. What kind of life that life is.

So pure. So holy. So righteous.

So loving. Full of light. No darkness at all.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the nature of this life in you. And what you need is to cultivate that life. Follow the nature.

When you are faced with a problem, this life within you, the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, He will tell you which direction to go. If you go in that direction, you feel peace and life within you. If you go against the direction, you feel death in you.

Spiritual death in you. I believe, brothers and sisters, we all have such experiences. When we are faced with a problem, we do not know what to do, and if we follow our natural life, our natural like and dislike, well, we will go a certain way.

But somehow you find there is another life within you that is clean. Holy. Separated.

That shrinks back from such. And if you persist, follow the natural life, what happens? Now, that is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. A Christian should not sin, but a Christian can sin.

Now, suppose you sin. What's the difference between you and a non-Christian? Arguably there is no difference, but actually there is difference. Because a non-Christian who sins, there is a pleasure there.

He feels comfortable. He feels that he gets a sense of false glory. But with a Christian, if you sin, you feel miserable.

Why? The new nature in you says, no, that's against my nature. Brothers and sisters, as believers, how we need to follow the new nature within us. If you develop that nature, it will become a habit.

And when habits are formed, a character begins to appear. The personality of Christ is being revealed, manifested in your life. So, dear brothers and sisters, spiritual discernment is a matter of life.

There is no shortcut to spiritual discernment. You need to follow, seek the eternal life. As the scripture says, follow life.

You need to exercise your spiritual senses. You know, brothers and sisters, in Hebrews chapter 5, verse 14, we are told, you know, babies, they can only eat milk. Now, what is milk? Milk is pre-digested food.

You cannot eat meat. You cannot eat solid food. So your mother, she will eat meat, she will eat solid food, and she will digest them, and after it is digested, it becomes milk for the babies, to nourish the babies.

Now, why is it that babies cannot consume solid food? Because they are not skillful in it. They have not been exercised. But for grown-up, you are able to consume solid food, because you are skillful.

You have exercised your senses, and having exercised your senses, you are able to consume solid food. Spiritually, this is the same thing. We need exercise.

You remember Paul said to Timothy, in 1 Corinthians 4, verses 7 and 8, Exercise yourself unto godliness. We need to exercise ourselves unto like God. Physical exercise, exercise of the body, has little profit.

There is some profit. Especially with young people, you need physical exercise. It is profitable.

You cannot study all the day. You need to take time out to have some physical exercise. It is good for your body.

But physical exercise, its profit, is little. It gives you a healthy body, that's all. And it's just for a short time.

Your life duration. But spiritual exercise, exercise unto godliness, is profitable. Not only in this age, but even in the age to come.

But brothers and sisters, do we exercise spiritually? What is spiritual exercise? You know, in the Roman days, especially with the Greeks, their beauty is bodily beauty. So they send their children to gymnasiums to develop a well-formed, go through all kinds of exercises under a tutor. So that they can develop an all-round beautiful.

But as believers, we need to go into the gymnasium too. Our gymnasium is the world. Your everyday life, everyday occurrences and events, people you meet, things you face, events that come to you, all these are the instruments in the gymnasium.

And we are there to exercise. To exercise our spirit. Under a tutor, of course.

Now, physically, if you want to exercise, you need an instructor. Otherwise, probably you may hurt yourself. Spiritually, the same thing is true.

For us to have spiritual exercise, we need a tutor, an instructor. And thank God, He has provided us an instructor, the Holy Spirit. He is our instructor.

He knows exactly what we need to develop that spiritual discernment. So He puts us into all kinds of circumstances. Dear brothers and sisters, we often say, to a believer, there is nothing by chance.

God has ordered the details of our life. The Holy Spirit has arranged every circumstance for us. We call it the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

And here you find He arranges all kinds of circumstances and puts us in there. But there, He wants us to exercise. Dear brothers and sisters, the more you exercise your spirit, the more sharp, sharper it becomes.

We need to exercise our conscience. A Christian conscience is very important. You know, in the world, everybody has a conscience.

That is the last trace of the function of the spirit that still remains. And thank God for that. Because otherwise, we would never be saved.

But God left a little trace of conscience there. So our heart can be pricked, our conscience can be pierced. But to a fallen man, the conscience is not of standard.

Because the conscience of standard, the standard of conscience, is God. Not culture, not history, not custom, not teaching. It is God.

So the conscience of an unbeliever is not dependable. Even a robber says, I do everything by my conscience. A cannibal can eat another person and find very proud of it.

His conscience never bothers him. But to a believer, brothers and sisters, especially young brothers and sisters, the moment you are saved, your conscience of the heart has been cleansed. And God has become the standard of your conscience.

The Holy Spirit is speaking to you through your conscience. So sometimes we say the conscience is the voice of God. We need to learn to listen to the voice of our conscience.

Often times you find there is a battle there. Your reasoning says yes, but your conscience says no. Listen to your conscience.

You need to exercise your conscience. When your conscience is pricked, when your conscience is touched, do not quench it. Do not neglect it.

Listen to it. Pay attention to it. We need to keep a conscience without offense before God.

That is exercising our spiritual sense. When you exercise your spiritual sense, then your spiritual discernment gets sharper. In whatever area you are being dealt with by God, in that particular area, you are very sensitive.

Whenever something happens in that area, you discern it immediately. Not only in you, but in other people. But in places where you have neglected your conscience, you will be kept in dark yourself and also in other people.

You will not be able to detect it because you have not exercised your conscience. To distinguish between good and evil, we need to exercise our intuition. That is the direct knowledge from God.

God speaks to us directly, to our spirit. It is not information that we gathered from outside. It is a direct speaking of God.

We need to exercise our intuition. We need to exercise our communion power to commune with the Lord. The more you commune with the Lord, the keener will be your perception.

Brothers and sisters, there is so much we need to learn. As a matter of fact, the exercises not only of our spirit, all the functions of our spirit need to be exercised. The more you exercise them, the sharper they become.

But even our soul needs to be exercised too. We need to exercise our will to submit to the will of God. We need to exercise our mind to have the mind of Christ.

We need to exercise emotion that we may be delivered from the natural emotion. And our emotion be expression of the love of God. That is why we need to deny ourselves.

Take up the cross and follow the Lord. This is exercise. And this exercise is in the soulful realm.

And we need to exercise even spiritually in the physical realm. You remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, I buffet my body and put it underneath me. We will not allow our body to rule over us.

You know, body has its own lust, has its own passions. We need to control it, put it underneath us. That is not asceticism, ill-treating our body.

No. That is discipline in it. So we will not be controlled by the passions of our body.

But we are able to put it underneath us and become slaves to the righteousness of God. These are exercises. Dear brothers and sisters, Christians today are not exercising.

We do not even know how to be a Christian, live a Christian life. We all live outwardly. It is not real.

A real Christian living is a life with the spiritual exercises going on all the time, led by the Spirit of God, increased in the knowledge of God, knowing Him, gaining Christ, and our spiritual discernment is increasing. It comes with life. But then, dear brothers and sisters, sorry, spiritual discernment is sacred.

You know, in spiritual things, on the one hand, it is glorious, but on the other hand, very dangerous. Spiritual discernment is a glorious thing, because you are able to discern, know what is right, what is wrong, know God's will and man's opinion, know what is of yourself and what is of God, what is the soul, what is the spirit, the world and God. I mean, it is glorious.

It is very dangerous. Spiritual discernment, if it is not exercised with humility, it is the most dangerous thing. Spiritual discernment has to be accompanied by humility.

As a matter of fact, spiritual discernment is self-knowledge. You know yourself. Brothers and sisters, you cannot know God if you do not know yourself.

But you will not be able to know yourself by yourself. Our heart is deceitful above all things. Self-knowledge comes through dealings, through discipline, through exercises, through the growth of life.

As you grow in the Lord, you know more of Him. You know more how miserable, wicked, nothing good, in yourself. It gives you this knowledge.

And with this knowledge, you know God, how good, how perfect. But unfortunately, you will find if spiritual discernment is developed, and you develop a certain point, when you begin to be proud, of your spiritual discernment. Because you can see what others do not see, you see.

And when pride begins to come into your life, brothers and sisters, that's the downfall. You enter into deception. And that deception is the darkest of all deceptions.

You become proud, you become critical, you become hard, you are totally deceived. You think you are always right. You think you always see the right thing.

And because you see, you cannot bear other people. This is the risk, the danger of spiritual discernment. Therefore, spiritual discernment has to be accompanied with humility.

As a matter of fact, it should humble you. Because if you can discern, you see how bad you are, how nothing you are. Everything is God's grace that you can even exist.

Everything is grace, grace, grace. It should humble you. It should not elate you.

But unfortunately, that's what we are. And we fall into deep deception. So dear brothers and sisters, there is a warning here.

Spiritual discernment is not for boasting. It is not for criticizing. It is for your spiritual maturity.

And it is for your spiritual ministry. With spiritual discernment, you are able to minister to your brothers and sisters. Because you know what they need.

You know where they are. You are not deceived by outward appearance. You touch people's spirit.

You sense what is within. And you are able to help what other people are not able to. That is the use of spiritual discernment.

So dear brothers and sisters, seek spiritual discernment. But remember, always, in love and in humility, Lord, there is something that Thou does desire to give to Thy people. Something needed, desperately needed, important to our own self and to the maturity of the Church.

Lord, we do pray that if it is Thy will, that we want it. But we want it for Thee, not for ourselves. Oh, keep us always in humility and in love.

We ask in Thy precious name.

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