

# Discernment - Part 5

by Vance Havner

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*Vance Havner emphasizes the importance of discernment and self-examination in the observance of the Lord's Supper as a means to deepen our faith and experience revival.*

**Duration:** 38:29

**Topics:** "Discernment"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of patient continuance in our faith. He acknowledges that in today's fast-paced world, it is easy to jump from one thing to another without seeing things through. He shares the story of Jesus preaching a sermon that drove the crowd away, but the disciples remained faithful. Peter, despite his mistakes, gives three reasons for being a Christian: there is nowhere else to go, Jesus has words of eternal life, and he gives a foretaste of glory. The preacher encourages believers to focus on the true value of what we have in Jesus and to actively pursue it, rather than relying on external stimuli or revivals.

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## Transcript

Well, I'm glad that some of you have practiced the grace of patient continuance. You've lasted through it. I begin to get acquainted with you.

Some of you look natural by now. You've been here every morning. That says a lot.

We are beset these days with the problem of not seeing things through. And in a study like this, it's pretty important. And then this is a time, of course, when we're all jumping around from here to yonder.

There's so many things coming and going, we want to hear them. I always think about that old tale about the razorback hogs in Arkansas. They were so skinny, and somebody asked the farmer, What's the matter with these hogs? Well, he said, it's a long story.

He said, I used to bring corn out here to the rail fence where they are, and I'd knock on the fence, and they'd come running, feeding. But he said the corn played out. And then it came spring, and the woodpeckers started coming.

And the woodpecker would bang over here, and the hogs would all go running over there. And then the woodpecker over here, and they'd all go running over there. So they just wore themselves out running after those woodpeckers.

You know, there's a lot of pulpit woodpeckers these days over the land, and people are just chasing all around. I don't believe in that view of the invisible church that makes you invisible at church. I think you ought to be at some church and stay with it and see it.

I appreciate your staying with me. I know a lot of folks can't. Some folks have come quite a distance from morning to morning.

And I trust you've been repaid. Now we come to another discernment that's never had the attention it deserves. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul writes about the observance of the Lord's Supper.

We'll read all of that part in order to get the background. Verse 23, 1 Corinthians 11, For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you.

This do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood. This do ye, as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation or judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, and that doesn't mean go to bed and go to sleep, it means die. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, but when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, and we should not be condemned with the world. This is a profoundly serious portion of scripture, and I marvel that through all these years I have heard so little said about the seriousness of this thing, of not discerning the Lord's body.

In the light of this passage, most of our Sunday morning church members are eligible either for the hospital or the graveyard. Some get sick and some die. When I see the careless way that so many times we rush through this ordinance, tacked on maybe to the end of a Sunday service, I marvel that we survive.

It's a memorial to the Lord. We remember our Lord's death for us until he comes for us, and to partake unworthily doesn't mean that we are ever worthy. We couldn't possibly be.

But it means in an unworthy manner. It's to come to the table without a proper regard for all that he wrote for us on the cross. And we're not ready to partake until we've examined ourselves and searched our hearts.

Therefore, Paul says, examine yourself before you partake. There's plenty of self-justification today. There's a verse that has this phrase in it.

And he willing to justify himself said. Oh, you could put a lot after that. People today justify themselves for what they do and what they don't do and what arguments.

They don't have any reasons. They have excuses, and an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. And that won't pass.

And he willing to justify himself said. There's not much self-judgment. There's a lot of self-justification.

The Bible says don't justify yourself, judge yourself that you be not judged. Mel Trotter, the evangelist, was having a prayer meeting one time, and everybody had prayed but one man. Mel said, Pray, brethren.

He said they can't. Mel said, What's the matter with you? He said, Oh, nothing. I just can't pray.

Mel said, Get down on your knees and confess your sins. He said, I can't think of anything, Mr. Trotter. I can't think of a thing.

Mel said, Get down there and guess at it. And he got down there and guessed at it and guessed it the very first time. You know, there are folks today who if they'd guess at it, if they'd turn off TV long enough, if anybody ever does, turn it off long enough to think and be quiet.

It wouldn't take long. You'd hit it, very first guess. There's no better place for a revival to begin than at the Lord's table.

And I've never heard the one starting there, because properly the observance begins with self-judgment. We're missing a great opportunity for revival when we hurry through the Lord's Supper and we're inviting furthermore the judgment of God. Plainly says that.

We sometimes make a mockery of it. If you want to know how much discernment there is among us today, you ask the average church member what the Lord's Supper means to him or to her. And if they tell the truth, you will be saddened by some of the replies you get.

If it doesn't mean much, then the Lord's death doesn't mean much. And if the Lord's death doesn't mean much, you wonder whether the Lord means much to them. But the Lord's Supper not only looks back to his death and forward to his return, it has significance for us now.

You remember that the Passover lamb was eaten. Its blood was put on the doorpost, but the lamb was eaten. And we overlook that so often.

Now, the elements of the Lord's Supper are only symbols, of course. They convey no grace. But as we partake, we ought to remember that Christ is not only our Savior, but our sustenance.

I know that Jesus was not talking about the Lord's Supper in the sixth chapter of John. But I must confess that every time I partake of the Lord's Supper, John 6 comes to my mind. Because in that wonderful discourse, he said, Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you.

Now, we Baptists, in our reaction to sacramentarianism, sometimes go too far and make too little of the memorial supper. It's not a matter of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. There's no spiritual presence in the bread and cup any more than saving grace in water baptism.

But we do declare, whether we realize it or not, we are saying, by symbol at least, that Jesus is my food and my drink. And I am living by the constant and continuous appropriation of the living Christ by faith for every need. Now, that ought to start a revival.

When we memorialize his death, we are thinking about Jesus Christ, the same yesterday. When we anticipate his return, we're thinking about Jesus Christ, the same forever. But this looks to another Christ, another phase, Jesus Christ, the same today.

And we're weak on that. And without that, our efficiency, without his sufficiency, is only a deficiency. Discerning the Lord's body in its widest sense suggests more than is immediately involved.

And I'm not trying to read into it or out of it what's not there. But I believe that discerning the Lord's body, among all other things, carries with it being aware of all we have in Jesus Christ, not only for salvation but for sustenance, the supply of every need and the answer to every problem. I have said through all these years that when churches try so hard trying to promote evangelism and missions and social action in drives and campaigns to enlist half-hearted church members to get them to do what they don't want to do anyhow, that if only Christians and churches realized what we are and what we have in Christ Jesus, all these things to try to get them to do would be the spontaneous expression of their consciousness of the Lord and the outliving of the inliving Lord.

If we abide, we will abound. And in all the things we're working so hard trying to get church members to do, if they'd only abide in him as he abides in them and discern what they have and avail themselves of it, I wonder what would happen. If the time and money and effort we spend trying to stimulate Christians in evangelical and in evangelistic and missionary conferences, and I go to a lot of them and I've said it again and again and again, if we spent all the money and the time that we're spending in all this on spiritual discernment to try to get people to see what we have in Jesus, we wouldn't have to have pep rallies and maybe even so-called revivals wouldn't be necessary.

I've heard of a man who made a living on a poor piece of ground all his life, died poor. His son took over the property and discovered oil and became a millionaire. It was there all the time, but the first man didn't know he had it.

The second man found out what he had, but he did more than find out what he had. He went after it. He could have sat there all his days and said, this is a remarkable place, there's oil under the ground here.

But he went after it. He sank a well. Some people don't even know what they have in Jesus, and some do know theoretically and theologically what they have, but they never start drilling for oil.

And some Christians, thank God, have and know they have, and they go after it by the appropriation of faith. And that's what I'm talking about. Some Christians don't know there is a promised land, Canaan, Beulah Land.

You know, that's the national anthem of Southern Baptists, on Jordan's stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye. Canaan's fair and happy land where my possessions lie, but I haven't got a bit of business standing on Jordan's stormy banks, casting a wishful eye. Well, to cross over the river and take the country.

That's the meaning of it. It's a land of a victorious Christian life now. Oh, you have some dear souls that live all their lives on reports from spies who've been over in the land and come back with a basket full of fruit.

And they'll run from one Bible conference to another to hear what this fellow brought back from the promised land. And they never go themselves. Some live on travel brochures of the promised land.

Now, that's a poor substitute for seeing the country. And some of them put tourist stickers on their baggage of all these lands when they've never been out of the county. That's a terrible way to live.

God wants you to get over there and possess the country. That's what Joshua said. Let's get going here.

Let's take it. There's only one Christian life ever been lived. Not the one that's ever been lived.

And it was lived by the Lord himself. But he lives it again and again and again in us. When we open the door of our hearts and say, Lord Jesus, make yourself at home in my heart.

Be yourself in me. That's a pretty good way to pray it, I think. Lord, just be yourself in me.

That's what the Christian life is. And it grows by food, rest, and exercise. Just like a boy grows.

If a boy didn't eat, he wouldn't grow. If he didn't rest, he wouldn't grow. If he didn't exercise, he wouldn't grow.

Now, some folks feed all the time. They study the Bible. But when they come to a crisis, they don't rest in the Lord.

It's theoretical, but they don't practice it. And then, Lord, help us. We have so many who don't take any exercise in working out these things in their daily lives.

You no doubt have read Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret* and how after years of striving and defeat, he finally came to see that it wasn't his faith, but God's faithfulness, and that the relation was that of the branch to the vine. Paul said, having nothing and possessing all things. Now, what a paradox that is.

Did you know you can have nothing and everything, both at the same time? That's what he had. And again, he said that he had suffered the loss of all things. Well, he didn't have anything.

Then he turns right around and says, but all things are yours. Paula, Paula, secrets, world, life, death, things present, things to come. I've got nothing, I've got everything.

Now, the devil cannot do anything with a fellow like that. What's the devil going to do with anybody like the devil? Say, I'll give you this and I'll give you that. And the Christian says, you can't, I've got everything.

And that makes the devil mad. He says, I'll take this away and I'll take that away. And the Christian says, you can't, I don't have anything.

What are you going to do? You can't hit him off if you take off his head. What are you going to do with a fellow like that? Oh, if we could only bring this thing up today. Give me a band of people who live as though Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning and is coming back tonight.

To turn the world upside down. Paul had nothing. The only stocks and bonds he had were stocks for his feet and bonds around his wrists.

That was his stocks and bonds. But he said, all I want is to know him and his. Three hises there.

The power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering, and conformity to his day. Now, the trouble with us today is we're living for me and mine, instead of for him and his. If you can ever get away from me and mine, get over to him and his.

That's it. That's the Christian life. Before John Wesley came along, England was in a bad way.

Somebody said the Puritans had all been buried and the Methodists hadn't been born. Well, that would be quite a sad hour, wouldn't it? And one day, a frustrated preacher, an Oxford man, whose father and grandfather and great-grandfather had all been preachers, whose mother was one of the greatest women who ever lived, himself a university man, separated, a man of prayer and a missionary, was still not ready to preach. The first evangelistic conference I ever attended to speak in was in First Church, Dallas, back in 40-something.

And when I got ready to go out there, I found myself preparing some messages, and one with a lot of John Wesley in it. And I thought, what are you doing going out to preach to the Baptists with all this John Wesley? And I got there and they asked me over to SMU to preach to the preacher boys. And I said, there's where I'll get to use my Methodist sermon.

And I said to those preacher boys, what I've just said to you, John Wesley had the most formidable qualifications possible for the ministry except the main thing. Talk about ancestry and education and seriousness and sincerity and all the rest of it. He had it and he was a missionary.

And I was in Brunswick, Georgia, First Church, for a meeting. And you know the Methodists have a wonderful campground across the marshes over there. Oh, it's a beautiful place.

And I had the preacher to take me over one morning and leave me and come back and get me. Nobody there at that time. Conferences weren't in session.

And they have a Bishop Arthur Moore in the marker for John Wesley, has one of the most remarkable statements. I walked over to that place and I thought, now here's where a man came, a missionary who still needed to have his heart warmed. And when that happened, he got on horseback and changed the course of England.

And Charles Wesley set the church to sing, Oh for a Thousand Tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's praise. You know, our Baptist hymnal, what am I going to do? The Baptist hymnal hasn't got my favorite verse of Oh for a Thousand Tongues in there. Took it out, never put it in.

Hear him, ye deaf, his praise ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ. Ye blind, behold your Savior come and leap, ye lame for joy. I don't know whether they thought some Baptist might take that literally and start jumping around, but the possibility is so remote that I don't think they ought to worry about that.

I'd be willing to risk that any time. When our Lord cleansed the temple, they had a revival. Have you noticed that? You're not going to have a revival until the temple is cleansed.

You've got to get rid of some things in some churches. Some things have to go out, and not only some things, sometimes some people. And some come in.

And when Jesus cleansed the temple, then the blind came in sightless and went out seeing. The lame came in limping and went out leaping. And the little children were waving palm branches and crying, Hosanna! There was only one crowd that didn't like it, and it was the Pharisees.

They wouldn't, that much. They went to Bible, went to church, read the Bible, prayed in public, were tithers, every one of them. Lived clean moral lives, separated from the world, tried to win others, and went

to hell.

You know you can be mighty good and not go to heaven? You can be that good and not go. And that's pretty good, and that's better than a lot of church members. Because a lot of our church members don't do some of those things.

Jesus said, Now, don't do like they do. Do what they say, but not what they do. And he reserved his most terrific sermon in Matthew 23, scathing denunciation for that very crowd.

Publicans and harlots will go to heaven before you. Blinds strain out the net and swallow a camel. Sepulchres full of dead men's bones.

And if a revival ever starts in a church, you watch it. The children and the childlike. And Jesus said, You have to be childlike to get into the kingdom.

There are two keys to the kingdom, conversion and childlikeness. Except you be converted and become as little children. A revival is when childish church members become childlike.

And the bunch that won't, by then, they stand on the side saying, I don't like this. The Pharisees said, We don't like this, it's too noisy. And they went up to Jesus and said, Hearest thou what these say? These kids are making too much racket in the temple.

And Jesus said, Have you never read? Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise. Oh, what an answer. What an answer.

Jesus said, You compass sea and land to make one proselyte. You're going after members all the time when you make him. He's twofold more the child of hell than you are.

Now, you think you've heard some rough preacher, maybe in the past somewhere, but you've never heard anything like that. And that was Jesus Christ talking to the most religious people of his time, and it was the religious people of his time that spearheaded the movement that put him on the cross. I thank God for whatever is genuine in our young people's awakenings, and there's much that is.

But you don't have to limit it to you. Thank God in Jesus Christ there's something for everybody. I was telling Dr. Stanley yesterday about a miracle man in our church, First Church of Greensboro.

He's gone to glory now. He was the head of the drama department at the University of North Carolina just across the street from where I live. One of the buildings is named for him.

The Harvard man with a marvelous knowledge of literature and a sinner. Oh, what a sinner. And for 45 years his wife prayed that he'd become a Christian.

And one night he got saved all by himself in his bed upstairs, and I got to know him, and we became buddies. We'd go out and eat together. He loved to write.

He was preparing a book when he died. And in his 70s he got saved all of a sudden. I said, you didn't go to a revival? No.

Didn't hear a sermon? No. Well, I said, what happened? He said, God woke me up in the middle of the night and showed me what a lost sinner I was. And I asked him, and this is what embarrassed me.

In all these years did anybody ever say anything to you about Jesus Christ? No. I felt like having a spell of apologizing to Almighty God and him and everybody else from all of us, because that's pretty typical. There was a man, I don't know whether they thought he was so intelligent and all that they dared not face him, but when he became a Christian he became the most childlike person.

And what time he had left he said, I've got to work fast to make up for some lost time. We never were bragging on Jesus. He didn't know theology, but I was amazed at how fast he picked up.

Of course, he had a tremendous background of literature and all the rest of it in a keen mind. But, you know, the happiest fellow in the world is a young Christian before he's met too many Bible scholars. And I'm glad that he just came in brand new.

I remember being in a meeting in Grove Avenue in Richmond one time. A fellow joined the church on a Sunday morning, a brand new Christian, didn't know much, but he didn't know any better than to come to every meeting all week. There were some deacons that didn't make it, but he didn't know any better.

He thought you're supposed to go. And I'd look at him over there and I'd say under my breath, Lord, don't let him catch on. If he ever looks around and sees these deacons missing and the rest of it, it'll ruin him.

I said, don't let him, don't let him catch on. Well, Dr. Raymond Taylor was like that. Oh, how I treasured his fellowship.

He didn't live long, and I wish he were living now. We had a date to go out again to eat when he got sick and they took him to the hospital. His dear wife wrote to me later and said, well, he's where he wanted to be.

He was homesick for heaven. He didn't get started until the very last three or four years. But I say, it's not all for you.

It's for everybody. We've got no business living on crackers and cheese when we have a standing invitation to the banquets of the grace of God. Mephibosheth sat at the king's table and he was lame.

Thank God you may be crippled in one way or another, but you're invited. Now, one of these days when they have that marriage supper of the Lamb, you'll get rid of all that, even. All the ailments and the ureitis and the arthritis and the bursitis and all the other itises and everything else.

You'll sit whole in a new body at the great supper. You're not a pope or you're a prince. You're a princess.

Your father is rich in houses and lands. He holdeth the wealth of the world in his hands. Though in exile from earth, still you can sing, Oh, glory to God, how much I love thee, king.

I was in a meeting out in Midland, Texas. They have a great First Baptist church there. It's a town that was just an ordinary town out there in the middle of the desert until they struck oil and became a city with skyscrapers and all that sort of thing.

And I was there for a conference, and Dr. O'Brien up at Big Spring passed through his teaching job, and I was trying to preach. And I preached one night on foretaste of glory. That's what we have now, a foretaste.

We're living on samples of what is to be. You know, Jesus brought his sample case when he came down here. That's what his miracles were.

They were samples of what's going to be the general thing when he comes down to reign. And that's why I enjoy him so. He raised somebody from the dead.

One of these days they're not going to die to start with. But he's coming back. And when I was a kid, the book agents used to come by our house and leave a prospectus.

And it's made out of several pages and pictures out of the sure enough book. And we'd start reading that, and it was the most frustrating thing in the world. Page 5, next page would be page 27.

We couldn't get anywhere. And we said, we'll have that book if it's the last thing we ever do. It was good salesmanship.

But when Jesus came down here, he brought his prospectus. Gave us some samples of what it's going to be like when he reigns on earth. And that's why I just love it.

And he gave us a foretaste of glory. That's what Fanny Crosby is singing about, blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

And then Dr. O'Brien, after the service, got in his car and started to the hotel. And we didn't say a word for several blocks. And all at once he broke the prospectus.

And it's made out of several pages and pictures out of the sure enough book. And we'd start reading that, and it was the most frustrating thing in the world. Page 5, next page would be page 27.

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