

# SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

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What is your chief interest in life. What are you pursuing? Is it money or wealth. Is it pleasure, just having a good time? Is your greatest interest and desire your own physical comfort – the filling of your own belly? What do you value most?

I'm talking about values, and the most valuable of all possessions.

Think about it for a moment – what is it that you really want the most? When you think about what you would really like to have, what is your mind on?

Some who are yet single want marriage . There's nothing wrong with that but is there something else you want more.

Some want position or power. Some want to control what others do. Some desires are normal, natural and lawful, others are destructive and lawless. But even otherwise acceptable desires, if not placed in the right perspective, and properly managed, can become destructive and lustful.

What if someone with unlimited power and influence came to you privately and said to you, “Tell me what you want, and I'll help you get it”? What would your answer be?

That actually happened to someone in the Bible. And in the answer he gave is a lesson that ought to be indelibly stamped in the minds of each of us. 2 Chronicles 1:7.

Solomon could have given any answer. But the thing he longed for the most – at least at that point in his life and for some time following – the burning desire that inflamed his mind and stirred his passion was not great wealth, power or position, not marriage or physical gratification –what he desired, what he craved above all else was wisdom and knowledge to judge righteously (verse 10).

Solomon had been selected for a job. The job was ruling God's people, the nation of Israel.

Solomon knew that he wasn't of himself fit for the job. He knew he didn't have the savvy, the mind power, the wisdom and understanding to do the job (1 Kings 3:7-9).

Solomon's mind was on his job, ruling God's people as a servant. He knew that doing the job properly required more wisdom, more discernment and understanding than he possessed. Solomon understood his need for wisdom and a discerning heart, and he not only asked God to give it to him, he set about to seek and pursue it.

He knew that of all the things he could possess, nothing was more valuable than wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 3:13-15).

What set Solomon apart as a great ruler more than anything else was the wisdom to judge righteously (2 Chronicles 9:7-8).

What about us? Are our minds on the job we are preparing for, as kings and priests in God's Kingdom?

What I want to discuss in today's sermon is spiritual discernment – what it is, our need for it, and how

we can acquire it, and how to apply it.

Wisdom has been defined as “the power of true and right discernment” and to be wise as “seeing clearly what is right and just; having sound judgment” (*Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*).

Spiritual discernment is to be able to see what is true, just, right or wrong from God's perspective. Godly wisdom is spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:6, 13-16). To have spiritual discernment is to have the mind of Christ.

Brethren, we desperately need wisdom, understanding, spiritual discernment not only as future rulers in God's Kingdom, but now, in order to make proper judgments about our own lives and conduct in this life.

Like Solomon, we've been chosen to rule. In the Millennium we will be charged with ruling, teaching, training, serving the children of God among the peoples of the earth. We are going to be making judgments and decisions that will affect people's lives. We're also going to have to be able to teach them what is right and wrong and help them learn to make wise decisions.

Are we fit for the job? No, of and by ourselves none of us is yet fit. We need wisdom, knowledge, understanding that we don't have, just like Solomon.

The saints are to judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). “How much more,” Paul says, “things that pertain to this life” (verse 3).

We're responsible for making right judgments and decisions not only in the future, but right now, so that we can live our lives in a manner acceptable before God (Philippians 1:9-11).

What is right? What is wrong? And how can we go about doing what is right? These are questions we face everyday, even if we don't realize it.

Jesus requires us to “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

To do so requires spiritual discernment (Proverbs 15:21).

How can you have the spiritual discernment that you need?

(1) Ask God for spiritual discernment and seek it diligently.

Ask God for wisdom and he will give it to you (James 1:5). But there is a caveat. As you ask for it, you must also seek it. If you ask and seek, God will lead you to godly wisdom and spiritual discernment, but if you don't diligently seek it you won't find it (Proverbs 2:1-11; 20-22).

We must ask for and seek understanding and wisdom. Our capacity to discern right from wrong depends on it, as the above Scripture shows. That tells us that we must do our own thinking. No one else can do it for us. That does not mean you can't be taught, but it is up to you to prove (or discern) the truth or falsehood of what is taught (2 Thessalonians 5:21; Acts 17:11).

Seeking wisdom implies that you diligently apply yourself to learning (2 Timothy 2:15). “Rightly dividing” is from the Greek *ορθοτομεω*, which literally means to cut straight, but in this context means

to correctly understand and explain God's word.

Don't assume you know everything there is to know. All too often we in God's Church reach a certain plateau where we've learned a certain amount of truth but then we lose interest in learning more. We think we've learned everything that's important when in reality we've barely begun to learn even the basics. That's very dangerous because then when a crisis occurs – perhaps an apostasy, an assertion, or a trial of some sort that shakes your faith – you may find yourself woefully unprepared to meet it because you simply don't have the knowledge and spiritual discernment to meet the challenge. You may also be blind to your own errors and shortcomings (1 Corinthians 10:12).

If you think you know it all I've got a test for you. Open the Bible to any chapter, and read through it and see if you can thoroughly and correctly explain every concept, every word in the chapter. If you can't then you've got more work to do. If you can, go to another chapter. I think if any of us did that, and approached it intelligently and honestly, we'd quickly begin to find out how little we really know.

As you study, also delve into the history, the background, the customs reflected in what you're reading. That kind of information can often give you insight into shades of meaning and a depth of understanding that you won't have otherwise.

Studying to learn more of God's word should be a lifetime project that occupies your interest and attention until the last day that you draw breath. We're admonished by Peter to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), and that requires continuing study.

(2) Base your judgments on God's word.

The fundamental error of Adam and Eve in eating of the tree of the “knowledge [designation as the Hebrew *yada*, the root of *da`ath* can mean] of good and evil” was that they took upon themselves the prerogative of deciding what is right and what is wrong. Spiritual discernment is not you deciding on your own what is right or wrong, but coming to understand what God views as right or wrong.

God's view of right and wrong is revealed in his word. In reaching a judgment about a particular matter we must find out what God's word says about it, if anything (Luke 4:4; Psalm 119:105; 133; Isaiah 8:20).

For example: is it wrong to honor a couple who have passed a milestone in their marriage? Last week we had a cake and punch and so forth in honor of a 25 year wedding anniversary. Is that wrong, especially is it wrong to do on the Sabbath?

What guidance does God's word offer? As far as I know God's word doesn't say anything specific about wedding anniversaries, as such. But it does say something about weddings and marriage.

First, we're told in Genesis 2 that God is the author of marriage. It is a divine institution.

Second, we're told in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage is honorable among all.”

We're told in Romans 13:7 that we're to give honor to whom honor is due.

In 1 Peter 3:7 we're told husbands are to honor their wives. And in Proverbs 31 we find a good wife is honorable and worthy of praise.

To honor marriage and to show honor to those who have built successful marriages, then, is certainly in

keeping with Biblical principles.

There is nothing inherently sinful in wedding anniversaries, or anniversaries or annual observances in general. The Jews at the time of their deliverance from persecutors in Persia instituted the feast of Purim as an annual holiday on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as told in Esther 9.

Is it wrong to honor an anniversary occasion on the Sabbath by sharing cake and punch, or even a meal for that matter?

We are forbidden by Scripture to engage in secular labor on the Sabbath or other activities which are not in keeping with the sanctity of the Sabbath. However, we are not forbidden to do those things just so we can remain dormant for 24 hours every week, but rather so we can do those things for which the Sabbath was made.

The Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27). It is intended to benefit mankind. It is to be a delight (Isaiah 58:13). The Jews customarily put on their finest clothes and enjoy an especially fine meal to usher in the weekly Sabbath. Here we customarily have a congregational meal on the Sabbath once a month.

Feasting and rejoicing are not forbidden on the Sabbath. In fact, the Sabbath is a feast day (Leviticus 23:2-3). On two annual feasts we are to feast and rejoice before God for seven consecutive days, including Sabbath days.

An ancient Biblical custom was to celebrate a wedding with a feast of seven days, which included the Sabbath day (Genesis 29:27-28; Judges 14:10-12). Marriage is a type of the relationship that will exist between Christ and the Church in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 19:7). And a marriage feast is used as a metaphor for the Kingdom of God, especially during the Millennium, just as the Sabbath is a type of the Millennial Kingdom of God (Matthew 22:1-4; Hebrews 4:1-10).

We need to be careful about making up arbitrary rules about what may or may not be done on the Sabbath. Or making up lists of arbitrary rules as a standard of righteousness regarding any subject. God's law forbids harvesting on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21). The law also permitted one walking through a grain field to pluck the ears with his hand to satisfy his hunger (Deuteronomy 23:25).

The Pharisees had made up all sorts of rules of their own about what could or could not be done on the Sabbath. Such momentous questions as may you eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath by a hen were addressed in their rules (no if a laying hen, yes if the hen is kept to be eaten). Their rules forbade plucking grain on the Sabbath and eating it, and they condemned Jesus disciples for doing so (Matthew 12:1-8). They also condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14). Jesus condemned them, however, for teaching as doctrine the commandments of men, and rejecting God's law to keep their own traditions (Mark 7:1-13).

All human devised religions are the same in that they place human devised tradition on an equal plane with or above God's law. We must not do that, but rather live by God's instructions.

If wedding anniversaries are okay, why not birthday celebrations? What does Scripture say? No righteous person is recorded as celebrating his birthday. Job feared that his sons were sinning by celebrating their birthdays with feasting (Job 1:4-5). The custom of celebrating birthdays arose out of idolatry and superstition, and all sorts of idolatrous superstitions are embedded in the custom to this day. The only birthday celebrations mentioned in the Bible involve murder as a feature of the celebration (Genesis 40:20-22; Matthew 14:6-8). Heathen festivals are often the "birthdays" of their

gods, including the sun god under various names at the time of the winter solstice. But not only does the Bible not give us any command to celebrate Jesus Christ's birthday, the date of his birth is hidden from us. According to historical information neither observant Jews at the time of Jesus nor the apostolic Church celebrated birthdays. The early Church rejected the custom of birthday celebrations as idolatrous and frivolous. These are reasons I don't celebrate birthdays, now if you think it's okay, I'd like for you to show me the Biblical reasons why.

Some have alleged that Thanksgiving is pagan. The reasoning is that pagans had fall festivals and Thanksgiving is observed in the fall (pagans have festivals at all times of the year). Some Mexican and South American Indians allegedly used pumpkins and turkeys in their idolatrous feasts, and pumpkins and turkeys are associated with Thanksgiving day celebrations in the United States. However, thanksgiving is a biblical principle, and we read of thanksgiving festivals involving food in the Bible. There is no historical or cultural connection whatsoever between the American Thanksgiving holiday and pagan festivals in Mexico and South America.

As you look to God's word for guidance in making judgments, you must be open to correction (Proverbs 19:25)

(3) Don't jump to conclusions.

Assemble and weigh the facts in light of all applicable Biblical principles before making a judgment (Proverbs 29:20; Proverbs 18:13). Ask questions, probe, keep digging until you have all the information you need to make a fully informed and just judgment (Deuteronomy 19:15-20).

(4) Obey God's word.

Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 28:7, he who keeps the law is wise.

(5) Meditate on God's law.

Ponder how to apply God's law in real life situations. Those who know will be judged more sternly (Luke 12:47-48; John 9:41).

Understand the relative importance of various laws and principles that might apply to a situation (Matthew 23:14-28).

I hope what we've covered today can help you see the importance of spiritual discernment, and that we can all be encouraged to grow in wisdom and understanding, so that we might live justly before God, and fulfill his will in all things.