

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT IN THE LAST DAYS

By Abri Brancken

INTRODUCTION

The Church must develop its ability to properly discern the day and age we are living in. Unless we discern properly we will become deceived by the enemy. The apostle John issues a warning when he says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). According to the New Testament, discernment is not optional for the believer, it is required. To discern is to understand what is good and what is evil. The writer of the book of Hebrews instructs that those of spiritual maturity should be able to "have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb 5:13). Failure to distinguish between truth and error leaves the Christian subject to all manner of false teaching. False teaching then leads to an unbiblical mindset, which results in unfruitful and disobedient living. Many Christians do not take a decidedly biblical stand against the onslaught of unbiblical thinking and attitudes that face them throughout their day.

1 Corinthians 2:13-16, ESV

13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

16 "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

You can be saved and still be a carnal (soulish) Christian rather than a spiritual Christian. The soulish man cannot receive spiritual truths because it is spirit. Jesus regularly said "he who has an ear let him hear". A human being is comprised of body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 3 John 1:2; Psalm 16:9). However, human beings tend to rely on the body for input and the soul for decisions, while ignoring the spirit.

A life in the flesh and a life in the spirit represent two very contradictory ways of life. There is the natural man, he says, and the natural thinking which is shared by the world around and which, therefore, is limited, confused and uncertain in its judgment. Secular psychology cannot address the spiritual issues of mankind. Then there is spiritual thinking. The spiritual Christian has been given by the Spirit the mind of Christ, and his thinking, therefore, is comprehensive; it takes in all things. It is authoritative; the spiritual man is not to be judged by anyone. It is realistic; it deals with life as it really is. Sadly, Christian carnality has become normal.

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN

Not all Christians are living a spiritual lifestyle. Many Christians today are nothing but soulish. The regenerated follower of Christ is called to a lifestyle of spiritual discernment, walking in the spirit and not the flesh. In fact, I believe that very few Christians are properly discerning the day and hour we are living in. Many Christians live carnal lives, being led and influenced by what is happening around them instead of discerning what the LORD is busy with. We should not forget that the church is a spiritual entity. We are spirits having a temporal physical experience. We need to distinguish between the soulish (Greek: psuche) and the spiritual (Greek: Pneuma).

The more I interact with people the more I am convinced that most Christians judge and interpret life according to the soul, not the spirit. The soul appeals to emotions. It stirs you up. Therefore, the soulish and carnally minded Christians are very easily deceived. One of the essential things for spiritual success is to be able to discern between the soulish and the spiritual.

CARNAL CHURCHES IN THE LAST DAYS

Many church services today appeal to the soul, not the spirit of man. It lures people through carnal means like entertainment, nice music, nice buildings and feel-good sermons. Pulpits are filled with preachers preaching sermons that are often nothing more than soul-dressing. The false church which is the apostate church specialises in the realm of the soul. If you are living in the soulish realm you will be very impressed by the soulish church. The carnal church has no authority over evil spirits. In fact, it is controlled by dark spirits. Soulsh churches preach sermon after sermon telling people how great they are, making everyone feel good, but nothing changes in people's lives. It is all superficial, shallow and surface relationship with God.

The soulsh carnal church will join the one world religion and even persecute the true spiritual followers of the LORD. The church of the antichrist will look very similar to the true church of Christ. It will speak the same language and propagate seemingly similar values, but the motivation behind the words and messages will have evil as its source, not the Spirit of the Living God. You will hear the false church speak about love, caring, goodness etc. but those concepts will be weaponised to control you and strip you from your God-given rights. On the outside, it looks the same, but in its essence, it is not born of God and Christ will not be central to what it stands for. We must make a choice today. We are either 100% for Christ or you are against him. The false church will poison your mind to focus on everything else except Christ. The true Church of Christ is built by Christ, for Christ and not by human wisdom. You can be born again by the Spirit and yet still spend 90% of your time in the soulsh realm. If this is the case, your ministry and teaching will not produce any real life or power. Listen to John 6:63, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing..."

2 Timothy 3:1-5, ESV

- 1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.
- 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
- 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,
- 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
- 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

GOD IS SPIRIT

God is spirit (John 4:24). If we want to know God, we must experience Him spiritually. Although God works in tangible, physical ways through His creation (Psalm 8:3; 107:24), we come to know Him personally through the union of our spirits with His (Romans 8:16). As we allow the Holy Spirit free rein in our lives, we learn to live by the Spirit, rather than by emotion, impulse, or fleshly indulgence (Galatians 5:16, 25; Romans 8:14). We learn to discern the voice of God as distinct from our own thoughts (John 10:27). All of this takes place within the spirit, invisible to the other senses, but as real as touch, taste or smell.

Romans 8:5-6

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The basic characteristics of the works of the flesh are independence or self-dependence, self-confidence and self-reliance. These types of Christian values “self-will” above God’s will. Because God’s Spirit is suppressed in the lives of many Christians, the soulish and bodily realm will rule, allowing the power of darkness to get an advantage.

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Discernment is defined as “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure; an act of perceiving something; a power to see what is not evident to the average mind.” The definition also stresses accuracy, as in “the ability to see the truth.” Spiritual discernment is the ability to tell the difference between truth and error. It is basic to having wisdom.

So, how does one increase spiritual discernment? First, recognizing that God is the only one who can increase wisdom, pray for it (James 1:5; Philippians 1:9). Then, knowing the wisdom to distinguish good from evil comes by training and practice, going to the Bible to learn the truth and, by meditation on the Word, reinforce the truth.

1 Chronicles 12:32, NIV

from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command;

1 Chronicles 12 is a stirring chapter that describes the “mighty men” who helped David in war. The sons of Issachar were men who “understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.” People of understanding can respond appropriately to the circumstances that surround them. It is important to recognize that merely identifying problems does not necessarily “understand the times.” Many people fret and fume about the state of the world, without having any idea why we are entangled in a catastrophic mess. If we truly “understand the times”, we will recognize where to go to find the solutions we seek: To the word of God. Again, this involves more than merely quoting texts. It involves the ability to properly apply the principles of Scripture to our lives. And that involves more than applying our intellect; we must apply God’s revelation (our Bible) to the situation.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not understanding the times. They stood in front of the Messiah, yet they could not discern their reality.

Luke 12:56, NIV

Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?

LIVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Carnal Christians often live from the outside in. They have not renewed their mind with the Word of God or allowed the Holy Spirit to change them. They only function in the sense realm – what they can see, hear, touch, smell and taste. They only trust what they can see; they judge things by outward appearance. They try to control their behaviour without changing their heart.

In contrast, the spiritual Christian has submitted themselves to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, to be taught and to be changed into His image. The spiritual Christian has died to the material ways of looking at things. They function not just in the earthly realm, but also the Spirit realm. They trust the unseen – the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Proper spiritual discernment is accurately evaluating ourselves, people, and situations.

CONCLUSION

The Ecclesia is a spiritual gathering of those that are called out of this world and into the Kingdom of God. They have two sets of eyes and ears, the natural and the spiritual. You need to look through things to the motivation behind situations.

Hebrews 4:12, ESV

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Holy Spirit breathes life into that deflated human spirit, and a new creature is born (2 Corinthians 5:17). The more room a person gives to the Holy Spirit, the more power he or she experiences in living for God. Paul says that one walking by the Spirit is filled with all “the fruit of the Spirit”—Love (Agape), joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

We are required to yield to the Holy Spirit in order to become spiritual. We have to understand that the Bible teaches that in order to become spiritual we must be obedient. Discernment — the ability to think biblically about all areas of life — is indispensable to an uncompromising life. God not only wants us to move from lost to saved, but He also wants us to go from saved-carnal to saved-spiritual. Don't let carnal-minded Christians be your example of how to live. Jesus warned us that the Last Days will be known for deception. By knowing Truth, Christ, we will stand fast and secure throughout the shaking and every form of deception.