



### *The Natural Result of Spiritual Maturity (or Immaturity)*

*Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*

— Hebrews 5:11–14

A few months back in the article "[The Problem with 'Discernment'](#)" we looked at how the word "*discernment*" is used in order to understand what differentiates the gift of discernment from the general biblical admonition for all Believers to be discerning. Specifically we focused on the fact that in Philippians 1:9-11 where Paul encourages "*that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment*", the underlying Greek word for "*discernment*" is "*aisthesis*", whereas in 1 Corinthians 12:10 in Paul's list of the gifts of the Spirit, what many translations render as the gift of discernment he uses "*diakrisis*", a completely different Greek word which the NASB renders as "*distinguishing*". Whereas "*aisthesis*" is defined as perceiving with the senses as well as the mind – a process involving knowledge based on experience, "*diakrisis*" is the ability to distinguish the spiritual nature of something to determine whether it truly comes from God, from Satan, or the flesh. It is therefore quite interesting to note that the author of Hebrews speaks of the spiritually mature as having attained "*diakrisis*" not as the result of a supernatural gift, but as a natural by-product of a maturing faith.

The reason I first began to look into this in depth is because I wondered what the Church did for nearly 1,900 years without the self-

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described “discernment ministries” which so prominently populate the Internet landscape. Prior to 1995 I do not believe we can find a person or organization claiming to be a “discernment ministry”, so why have they become so prevalent? Part of the answer which I believe applies to the legitimately gifted and called in this arena has to do with the nearness of Christ’s Return, which is biblically characterized as rife with deception and apostasy; a disturbing but nonetheless additional underlying reason is that it is part of the overall deception and apostasy of the Last Days itself. Just as false prophets and false teachers greatly outnumber the true ones, so the “discernment ministry” industry appears to be dominated with more counterfeits than legitimate, authentic ministries. Satan always counterfeits numerically superior **quantities** in order to overwhelm the spiritually superior but relatively sparse **qualified** representatives of God’s Word.

Therefore I became concerned that Believers in general have allowed a group to co-opt for themselves the area of discernment. The false workers in this area are most easily identified by their attacks on other discernment ministries because they are trying to make their self the pinnacle by which all others are measured; the true workers in this area spend no time talking about themselves but trying to get people to compare what is going on with a given situation or personality in accordance with the already given standard of God’s Word. One group obviously believes discernment cannot be achieved without a new revelation through their personal “gift” or talent, the other embracing the notion that the gap can be sealed by returning to what God has already revealed in His Word.

But in Hebrews the writer makes the case that “*diakrisis*” – the word used by Paul to describe the gift of discernment or “*distinguishing of spirits*” (1 Co. 12:10) (the ability to distinguish the source cause of something or someone as divine, satanic, or fleshly), is a natural by-product of spiritual maturity. In fact, this is offered in the context of a rather sharp rebuke for spiritual **immaturity!** In other words, perhaps a third reason why the “discernment ministry” industry has risen to

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such prominence in the past 15 years is because of the growing problem of immature Christians coming to outnumber the mature.

*Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

— Hebrews 5:11

The writer of Hebrews **wants** to teach deeper, spiritual truths but is inhibited by Believers who *"have become dull of hearing"*. This is a common theme throughout Scripture that when it comes to the downfall of God's people it always begins with a growing indifference to His Word. The biblical definition of someone who "hears" is a life which actually puts what is heard or known of God's Word into practice. The Greek word *"nothros"*, here rendered as *"dull"*, is defined in *The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* as "slow, sluggish, indolent, dull, languid". In other words, the implication is that for Believers who can no longer distinguish the difference between a divine, satanic, or fleshly origin it cannot be attributed to a lack of "giftedness", but a lack of commitment to the Word. Without the razor sharp edge of the two-edged sword of God's Word, Believers become incapable of distinguishing the spiritual nature of things. Bluntness and dullness in one area quickly spreads to all areas.

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

— Hebrews 5:12

The writer of Hebrews further underscores the issue by pointing out that they have been Christians for such a long time that it is ridiculous that they should continue to need *"someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God"*. In other words there is an expectation that over time a practicing faith committed to God's Word and ways will not just merely be able to distinguish for themselves the difference between something or someone operating divinely, satanically, or in the flesh, but will be able to actually teach others how

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to do this for themselves! To me this affirms the assertion that the rise of so many to public prominence within the Church in the area of discernment is actually a direct result of the disintegration of everyday commitment to God's Word by the ordinary rank and file.

*For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*  
— Hebrews 5:13

What is the purpose of biblical righteousness? This is not an abstract theological term but a practical process applied to the daily walk of each and every Believer. The overall goal of sanctification is to strip a person of their own righteousness rooted in their old life in the world to be replaced by the visible righteousness of Christ as they progressively change into His image and likeness. In other words, Believers who "*have become dull of hearing*" where "*the elementary principles of the oracles of God*" are concerned lack the ability to distinguish what is going on. One of the ways this can be seen in the spiritually immature is when they join their own works with those of Christ, substituting experience and emotion for overriding obedience to God's Word.

*But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*  
— Hebrews 5:14

Is the ability to distinguish ("*diakrisis*") between "*good and evil*" is the natural by-product "*for the mature*" because it is a gift? Because some are naturally born with it? No, "*because of practice*".

There is no conflict here with "*diakrisis*" as a learned attribute of every maturing Believer and the gift of "*diakrisis*" as identified by Paul. The gifts are supernatural implementations of the spiritual responsibilities of every Believer. All are called to share the Gospel, but some are gifted to be especially effective as evangelists. Every Believer has the responsibility to evangelize whenever the opportunity arises; some Believers have the added responsibility to make this a priority in their

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walk. We could walk through each "gift" and make the same kind of case for each one that they are not a replacement for our individual responsibility in each of these areas. Likewise the gift of "*diakrisis*" is not a license exclusively relinquishing discernment to a specialist or the sole purview of the gifted; it is a reflection of something that is supposed to be present in **every** Believer.

So much of the focus on spiritual gifts is confined to Paul's teachings. I am referring to the problem of parsing Paul's words to the point where individual words are lifted out of context and an interpretation never originally conveyed by Scripture is enjoined. A lot of this has more to do with the ever-changing nature of the English language. I often attribute part of the process of sanctification as being re-educated as to what words mean. We grew up being taught by the world the definitions of words which are almost always a subtle if not outright corruption of what they actually mean in Scripture. The world has a definition of "love" which is very much at odds with that of God's Word, and so the struggle between the world's lexicon and God's continues for Believers as they mature in their faith and come to a full knowledge of God's meaning.

(As an aside, this is why I teach from the NASB rather than the KJV. The KJV is very accurate providing **YOU** are sufficiently educated to understand the definition of words several hundred years ago. Even a common preposition such as "from" in some instances in 17<sup>th</sup> Century English no longer holds the same meaning as we currently use "from". The problem is not the accuracy of the KJV as some might contend, the problem is really that our use of English has changed so that those who do not put in the time to understand the past definition of English words are in danger of ascribing a meaning which the KJV translators, much less the Holy Spirit, never intended.)

The overall point is that the ability to distinguish the difference between a divine, satanic, or fleshly authorship is a staple of every Believer's faith. It is not something automatically granted at the very

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instant of the salvation experience, but it is expected to come about as the natural result of a life increasingly embracing God's Word and ways. We are *expected* to eventually possess this basic capability. There will most certainly be an additional "gifting" for specific individuals, but the fact is that if the overall Church landscape was dominated by mature Christians committed to the Word, it would not be susceptible to the rise of a discernment cottage industry which, in my opinion, has far more counterfeits than authentic ministers. The very fact that fewer and fewer average Christians appear to be capable of differentiating between the divine, the satanic, and the fleshly is a very powerful proof in and of itself that we are, indeed, living in the Last Days when things are growing ever darker spiritually.

I suppose there is a case to be made that the purpose and role of God's Word in the Church should be zealously defended just because it is His holy Word, but I would offer that there is a very practical issue attached, which can be demonstrably proved in the numbers.

We live at a time when there is no longer any statistical difference in the beliefs and behaviors of those who say they regularly attend church and those who do not. There is no difference in the divorce rate, the abortion rate, the stance on any issue of sexual or moral relevance, and on down the line. When the Church becomes "*dull of hearing*" God's Word, they listen to something or someone else. When Believers can no longer "*discern good and evil*" for themselves they allow someone else to do it for them. The deception is that the Body of Christ must be "seeker sensitive" and dumb things down to the lowest common denominator in order to be "relevant", but the truth is that it needs to be built up and focused on attaining deeper spiritual things for the sake not just of its witness to the world, but for its own health. As it was at Christ's First Coming, so it is again in the shadow of His Return...

*For the heart of this people has become dull,  
With their ears they scarcely hear,  
And they have closed their eyes,  
Otherwise they would see with their eyes,  
Hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart and return,  
And I would heal them.'*  
— Matthew 13:15

In His Love,

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