

Studies on Practical Christian Living

Discernment

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Background

Ever since the fall we have been living in troubled times. *“For we know that the whole of creation groans together as in the pains of childbirth even now.”* (Romans 8:22). This is something that we as Christians cannot fail to be sensitive to, and aware of. When we read Genesis, we are presented with the unfolding truth of salvation history, and this together with faith and hope paints a panoramic picture of the character of God. This picture is complete when we look at the whole of Scripture for *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Timothy 3:16).

Discernment is a very real issue today; it is sad to see division among God’s people. We believe that when God sees His people, the Bride of Christ, He must often be heartbroken. Still, God *“desires all men to be delivered, and to come to a full knowledge of truth.”* (1 Timothy 2:4).

When we look around, we can clearly see that in today’s Church there are many false prophets and false teachers. (2 Peter 2:1-3, 2 Peter 3:14-18 and 1 John 4:1). We need to know what we believe and why we believe. This cannot come just from what other Christians tell us, but more importantly from a right relationship with God. We are both individually and corporately accountable and responsible. Remember, people can make mistakes, but God doesn’t! We always need to examine the motive, and ask ourselves does the teaching we are receiving measure up to what we know of God from Scripture. Is this teaching edifying?

We know that there are apparently God fearing Christians today who are deceived. However, we also know that *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.”* (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

God’s truth is liberating (John 8:36), and in this freedom we all need to *“clothe ourselves with humility towards one another...”*. (1 Peter 5:5). We all have something to bring, and we all have something to learn. Discernment is all about knowing God’s heart and being close to Him. If we are close to God, we will begin to realise what holiness is all about. The only way we can know God’s heart is to know Jesus. Jesus understands everything we can ever encounter.

The Message

God has given us as individuals more than sufficient tools for discerning truth from lies and we must not be afraid of applying these tools for ourselves. *“Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you, then you will abide both in the Son and in the Father... I wrote these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. As for you, the anointing that you received from Him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you abide in Him.”* (1 John 2:24-27).

Truth Biblical testimony: 2 Peter 1:20-21, 1 John 5:6-12

Personal Testimony: 1 John 1:1-4, 1 John 13-16

Discernment: 1 John 2:20-23, 1 John 4:1-2, 4-5

Obedience Putting our hearts right: 1 John 1:5-10, 1 John 3:23-24

Putting our lives right: 1 John 2:3-6, 1 John 3:17, 1 John 5:1-5

Love

For God: 1 John 3:1-3, 1 John 4:7-11, 1 John 16-21

For one another: 1 John 2:9-11, 1 John 3:18,

“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20-21).

Questions

Truth

1. Why is truth so powerful?
2. How can we discern truth?
3. How can we testify to truth more effectively in our lives?

Obedience

1. Why is obedience so important?
2. Can we discern other people's obedience to God?
3. How do we react to disobedience?

Love

1. Why is love so important to discernment?
2. How could we love better when we are trying to be discerning? Compose a list of principles that you could suggest to someone struggling to discern a Church issue lovingly?