



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 20th May 2018

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Jude 17 - 19

Subject: Part 10 - Spiritual Discernment

“But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.”

Throughout this letter, Jude has been warning the believers not just of apostates out there in the world but those that are within the church, the hidden ones, the clouds without water, the autumn trees without fruit, the foaming waves and the wandering stars. He gave not just examples of such from history but their characteristics and personal traits. He warns believers intensely because of the damage that apostates and their false teachings can have. In fact, let's remember, this is not just a letter from Jude, but Jude himself acknowledged back in the 3rd verse that the Holy Spirit impressed upon him to write about these things. So now as we come to verse 17, Jude shifts gear and focuses on the believer, ***“but you, beloved”*** How can they now content for the faith? This is a crucial question posed to each one of us and one we need to consider if we haven't done so before. How can we, as believers, practically contend for the truth so that we will be victorious in a day of rampant falsehood? In other words, how can we personally apply Jude's cautions regarding apostasy to our own lives and ministries? To be sure, Jude's warning is unmistakable, and it clearly demands a response. But what does that response look like? And where does it begin?

It begins by Jude's recognition that his readers needed more than just a warning or even descriptions so they can recognise their enemy; they also needed a plan of attack. Instead of being merely defensive, they had to be proactive in their fight for the faith. This means taking action; not only in reinforcing their own spiritual armour ([Ephesians 6:10-17](#)), but also in coming to the aid of others in the church. This is not solely the pastor's responsibility, but each and every member of the body of Christ has a duty of care for each other.

In order to do this, Jude's readers desperately need to develop discernment. This is so true for us today; wake up, look around and feel the temperature of the global church. We need to be able to recognize the difference between truth and error. Otherwise, we will not know what to embrace and what to shun, or even who. We cannot "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (v. 3) unless we are able to discern true faith from its counterfeits. Thus, if we are to heed Jude's warnings, we must begin by actively pursuing spiritual discernment.

The type of discernment we want to principally focus on today, is the one Jude points to here in verse 17

"remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ"

This is our protection, not just reading the word of God, but truly knowing it and implementing it. The importance of discernment is underscored throughout the whole of Scripture:

Proverbs 2:3-6

"Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding"

Philippians 1:9-10

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ"

The apostle Paul, for example, voiced his fear that the Corinthians would be led astray:

“I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.” (2 Corinthians 11:1-4)

Concerned about their lack of discernment, Paul feared that the people would be deceived by false teachers. They were far too tolerant of error, and as a result they foolishly threw open the door to apostasy.

This wasn't the only time that Paul warned the church about the need for discernment. In Acts 20, Paul talks to the Elders in verse 17 and then in verses 28-31, he speaks to the church to be careful. It's interesting that Jesus himself warned the church at Ephesus, in Revelation 2:2-6:

“I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

Doctrinally this church was sound, and Jesus commended their discernment, but, they left their first love. Not only is it important to know the word of God and keep close to it, so we can be careful in relation whom or what to embrace or shun, but we must be careful not to forget about our relationship with Jesus, that must be first and fourth most. He must always be kept as our first love.

Along those same lines, Paul admonished the Thessalonians to prize sound teaching and exercise discernment. He instructed them,

“Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22)

The believers in Thessalonica were to respond carefully to the spiritual messages they heard; examining them thoroughly to see whether or not they aligned with apostolic teaching. The messages that passed the test were to be held fast and embraced. But, those that did not, were to be let go and rejected.

Even the Jewish religious leaders and elite scholars of Jesus' day lacked spiritual perception. The Lord indicted them for being more discerning of the weather than spiritual matters:

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’ And in the morning, There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away. (Matthew 16:1-4)

Despite their demanding attention to Scripture, their rigorous theological training, and their prominent status in the community, the Pharisees and Sadducees rejected the truth because they could not discern it.

Tragically, there are many in the contemporary church who also lack spiritual discernment. Such people are far better at staying in tune with cultural trends than they are at appreciating and understanding biblical doctrine. In some cases, whole churches have shifted their focus from the clear teachings of Scripture to the felt needs of sinners. They want to make the church service “comfortable” and “non-confrontational.” As a result, the messages they champion are theologically weak at best, and the people they serve are doctrinally naive. Those churches are defenceless against error. You would really have to question, are those preachers and the listeners even saved, because there are many preachers that blaspheme God and the listeners seems to be taken in with it, as they are listening to a message where the God of Heaven is more than happy to service them, if only they had enough of faith! The issue here is another gospel and another God, it may be a triune God, but Jesus and what he done is always attacked. I even heard some of the them that claim God is the biggest failure in the bible and Jesus is only a man who went to hell to be the first to be born again. The list of errors seems like it's enormous but listen careful and you will hear that it is a Satanic message. Some are a little more blatant than others, some are lovely people doing lovely

philanthropic work, but this must not take away from their messages that are leading many people into the fires of hell itself.

There are at least six reasons for the disturbing lack of discernment that characterizes much of contemporary Christianity.

Obviously, **the first** is the recent trend among many evangelicals to minimize the importance of doctrine. Those in this camp argue that biblical clarity is both divisive and unloving; to them it puts up walls, lacks humility, and hinders unity. The reality, however, is that the church has suffered severe consequences for abandoning its commitment to sound doctrine. Such repercussions include a false sense of humility and a false faith produced by “easy believism” and watered-down gospel presentations which produces professors of faith but not true disciples, a false unity based on inter-religious ecumenism and theological compromise, a false commission preoccupied with political activism and legislated morality, a false worship driven by man-centred services and experience-based Christianity, and a false ministry focused solely on temporal satisfaction and external successes. It all makes people feel comfortable in this life but utterly fails to prepare them for the life to come.

A second reason is that the church has become less objective in its outlook, substituting unconditional truth for moral relativism and post-modern subjectivity. Instead of seeing truth in terms of black and white, many Christians treat it as a grey area. But the Bible clearly makes absolute distinctions between right and wrong, truth and error, saving faith and false professions. The Lord Jesus’ teaching, for example, was black and white: He contrasted the broad way and the narrow way (Matthew 7:13-14), eternal damnation and eternal life (Matthew 24:46-51), the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:38), hate and love (Matthew 5:43-44), worldly wisdom and divine wisdom (Matthew 11:16-19; Mark 6:2), and so forth. In contrast, the contemporary church shies away from theological absolutes, preferring instead to tolerantly embrace “every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), as if that stance were a virtue.

Third, as part of its contemporary evangelistic strategy, the church has abandoned its commitment to the power of Scripture and has become preoccupied with its image. There is a fashionable ethos, in order to reach the culture, it has to become like the culture. nBut James wrote,

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4)

To be a friend of God makes us enemies of the world, and vice versa. We are kidding ourselves to think that the key to winning the lost is found in imitating them. How far is this way of thinking from Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:1 –

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

By mimicking secular society, some believers are actually forfeiting their distinctiveness and the power of the Scripture. These “Christians” don’t realise that the world is looking for something different, something that will bring them real hope, not what they are getting because they know, it doesn’t work! If the distinct call of the gospel is lost, any hope of evangelizing the culture will also disappear (**Matthew 5:13**).

Fourth, in consequence of the previous point, the church’s current lack of discernment stems from a failure to properly study and interpret the Scriptures, not giving the interpretation that suits their lifestyle or the way they want their God to be, but interpret it as God intends. Pastoral laziness, exegetical sloppiness, and a general attitude of indifference to God’s Word have plunged God’s people into error. I am not talking about secondary things, for example, such as when the great tribulation will happen and when the rapture will happen but I am talking about things like who Jesus is, who God is, who the Holy Spirit is, the way of salvation, living according to the revealed will of God in Scripture such as the commands like Love your God with all your heart, mind and soul. Paul wrote to Timothy about the deadly dangers of such spiritual apathy, urging him to:

“be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” 2 Timothy 2:15.

The book of Acts also commended the brethren in Berea for being

“more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” Acts 17:11

As the Berean’s example demonstrates, discernment cannot develop apart from a desire to know the truth and a determination to discover it. Yet this deep concern for truth is scarcely found today.

A fifth reason is the general abandonment of church discipline in evangelical circles. Matthew 18:15-18 tells us of the importance of it –

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

When God’s people fail to confront sin and heresy, wickedness within the body goes unchecked. The congregation inevitably accumulates more and more unregenerate members, and unbelievers who feel comfortable because their sin issues are never addressed. Even grievous immorality and major ethical lapses are sometimes overlooked, ignored under a false pretence of love. But a church cannot effectively promote discernment, or even love, if it happily condones sin or primarily consists of unsaved sinners. After all, the congregation that thinks incorrectly about holiness shows that it also thinks incorrectly about truth.

The 6th reason, for the church’s lack of discernment is the rampant void of spiritual maturity within its ranks. Those with a superficial understanding of Scripture and a weak grasp of sound doctrine, and a deficient view of God, cannot be discerning.

“Jesus answered and said to them, “Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?” Mark 12:24

Yet those are the very people who fill most pews each Sunday and growing number in the pulpit. Like the unbelieving Jews of the first century, many contemporary Christians would do well to heed the admonition given by the author of Hebrews:

“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 5:12-14)

If those in today's church are to honour the God of revelation and enjoy spiritual victory in their lives, despite the constant temptation to capitulate, they must begin by developing discernment. They must be able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, so that they will be able to pursue the one and flee from the other. Otherwise, in their confusion, professing believers will fail to contend for the faith before they even enter the battle.

So this is where the rubber hits the road, how do we attain discernment? Jude tells us in verse 17 – Remember! Jude's words echo verses 5-7 and 11-13, the remembrance of false teachers. He points out they were in the past in Old Testament times, Isaiah 28:7, they were infecting the church in Jude's time as well as the time of the apostles [I John 2:18&19]. In our time, these people are superstars with huge following, [Revelation 2:2&3 & 3:9] Due to the popularity, presence and power, it shouldn't in any way surprise the believer in any era.

Jude like Peter in 2 Peter 1:12&13 calls the saints to remember the truths that they have learned from God and not these quacks. He reminded the believer that 'their coming', as in the apostates, who were already prophesied. Jesus was the first to do so, see Matthew 7:15 and Matthew 24:11. Paul later done the same while he was under attack about his own apostleship, 2 Corinthians 11:12-15. Paul was well travelled for a man of his day, and so he was able to warn many true believers in his letters as he came across so many of them.

Peter done the same as we've already noted in 2 Peter 1. Also John, the beloved of the Lord, wrote on this subject extensively in his epistles. Not surprisingly, when you see the thousands who flock to hear and believe these false prophets. The thousands that actually believe in another God, another Christ, another gospel. Horrifically, if they die in such a state their circumstance is not just terrible but terrifying eternally. So is it any wonder that God in his mercy, love and long-suffering, spells it out time and time again. You must consider this as a real and present danger to our own souls because it will rob and destroy our peace and confidence in the Lord. We need to be mindful that the threats are not just from out there, in the sin cursed world, but from within, from imposters, from false brethren, who may be some of the nicest people you will ever come across, on the face of it.

So we need to remember the truths that have been taught in scripture and also the barriers that God has placed and not crossed them. Think of Demas, he travelled and worked with Paul but something within him loved the world more. Look at 3 John 1:9-12

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”

Diotrephes loved his position, he obviously felt powerful which was more important to him. This people have followers, even though they cause division. How opposite is this picture to Philippians 2:3&4

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

This brings us to verse 18 -

“How they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.”

This verse is very similar to 2 Peter 3:2&3

“that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,”

Peter like Jude, tells us to remember the Word of God and that there will be mockers in the last time, who walk according to their own lusts which we have already dealt with in previous verses. But let's just note that there are many verses in the bible about mockers. In Matthew 27 we see the account of how they mocked Jesus when they were crucifying him. Also in other gospels such as Luke 22 and 23, even in Luke 16 the Pharisees mocked him. Jesus himself warned in John 15:18&19—

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

This leads us to the last verse we are looking at this morning, which is verse 19 :

“These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit”

Not having the spirit. This is the end of the verse, but very important part of the verse as we are now clear who we are dealing with. Not just unsaved people, but oppressed and even some possessed people who are driven and directed by the devil and his angels, just like Judas. The darkness is so powerful that like Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 verse says that

“And no wonder, since Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Yes, he disguises himself as an angel of light but a flickering one at that. Never tired and never gives up because they are driven to destruction hence they produce division amongst God’s people whenever and wherever possible, where as we are led by God to unity in the truth and in Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2: 9-12 is very clear about these things

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

This is spiritual warfare with eternal implications.

Jesus urged the believer to remember – Remember the Lord’s table, and with this remembrance the Lord also urged us to examine ourselves, it’s so easy to look out, but as Jesus said “Take the Log out of your own eye before you take the spinster out of others”.

You know compromise in our own lives can often open the door to false ideas and then false teachings. Just little here and a little there. Often we compromise to bring happiness and peace with your friends, your family, husband, wife, children, whoever, by watering down what the word of God says.

We can forget, all too easily. Sometimes we chose to do so because it can often justify what we are really about. Remembering can be painful as well as pleasurable, depending on the memory but Paul in Philippians 4:8&9 directs us to a very favourable place –

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

The problem is that we always want to be our own man, in control, do what we think best and even model ourselves on people that impress us. Paul was not trying to place us in a strait-jacket but into spiritual freedom. Yet the problem is that Christians are afraid of being viewed as too spiritual. Sadly this leads to a condition known as Spiritual Schizophrenia and they end up being confused to who and what they really are. A word study in relation to remember or think in Scripture will give you a great challenge.

What value do we really place on biblical instruction? If we were to evaluate that on the basis of what is happening you would have to conclude not much for the vast majority. The world has its problems and within the church, we have problems of our own. It's not difficult to figure out what has happened. The world has been allowed to take a place within, it's no longer just an infiltration. The true teaching of Scripture and the Gospel has been diminished. Man is centre stage, or even the music groups are centre stage and what these people proclaim in the pulpit or on their stages, is taken as gospel. These false teachers and Apostates often claim to be in touch with God, but let us ask the obvious question, which God?

Holding firm is neither popular or easy, but neither is the narrow way. We need to make a firm decision to go one way, wide or narrow. The choice is yours.

I believe that Jude clearly points to division as worldly mindedness. That translated is a sensual person. They are not spiritual in any shape or form. Practicality and common sense all have their part but spiritual mindedness lifts us to another, and better level. Just think about the, Great kineo, The transforming power of obedience to God, found in Philippians 2. Image a group of people that would take these words to heart and practice them. The difference it would make.

We don't see Christianity no matter how hard we look in Jude verse 18 & 19. For us, it's not simply a question of rejecting false hood but what do we replace our rejection with, what do you believe? It all has to start in our own hearts and lives, not my brother, or sister but me.



1 Corinthians 11:19 tells us the reason for all these things:

“For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.”

We are told that we should love the Lord your God with all our mind, body, soul and heart. So that we are careful not to become like the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation and forget our first love in the midst of all this doctrinal and falsehood obstacle course.

We need discernment, we need wisdom and we need to imprint the word of God on our hearts and minds, and not let go of it.

James 1:5 tells us

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

We have to roll up our sleeves and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we need to keep on the narrow road.

Amen.