

# Biblical Discernment: How to Spot Spiritual Counterfeits Without Becoming a Critical Pharisee

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to go to Philippians chapter 1 this morning talking about discernment.! I think it's something that's sadly lacking across the church world.! Biblical discernment.

Imagine a master bank teller.! For 20 years he's handled thousands of bills every day. He doesn't study counterfeits.

He doesn't need to. He knows the genuine so well that when any fake bill touches his fingers, he knows instantly that it's fake.

It's a counterfeit. The weight is wrong. The texture is off. The ink feels different. This is what God wants for us.

Discernment. To know his truth so well that we recognise spiritual lies the moment they appear.

Discernment. Biblical discernment. And we live in a world, don't we, of spiritual counterfeits.

[ 1 : 02 ] There's so many fakes. Teachings that look right. They might sound right. They might feel right. So right. But they're deadly to our soul.

And Paul understood that danger. And so we're going to take it up in Philippians where he prayed for the Philippians. Just a couple of extracts there from Philippians chapter 1 from verses 9 to 10. Paul's prayer. It says, Notice that.

That your love may abound. Knowledge. Judgment. And then skipping forward to chapter 2 from verse 14 through 16. It reads, Do all things without murmuring and disputings.

That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. Among whom you shine as lights in the world.

[ 2 : 17 ] Holding forth the word of life that I may rejoice in the day of Christ. He exhorts them to love abounding of knowledge of judgment.

And he goes on further to talk about not murmuring, disputing. We're going to tie this all together as we go through this. And so notice there, he prayed for love.

Love that grows. And judgment that grows. Love and judgment. And that's true for us as a godly people. God helping us. That as believers, we'll know right from wrong.

We'll know truth from error. But here is the tension, if you like. The tension. How do we grow in discernment without becoming harsh? And how do we detect error without becoming fault finders? You know, some, you could say, they don't have the gift of discernment. They have the gift of criticism. Some people, they love exposing faults more than they love holding the truth.

[ 3 : 24 ] They become self-appointed spiritual police, if you like. Spiritual police. They criticize everything, but they build nothing. That's a danger, isn't it?

Now, of course, as a church, we want to be known as a solid, strong, biblical church. But the balance here is we want to be known as a church with love and kindness and care.

And it reads through the word of God of some that, of course, there's the spiritual judgment, there's biblical, scriptural judgment. But then there's some who are biting and devouring one another, filled with contentions, murmuring, disputing, accusers of the brethren.

The devil loves that. He loves character assassination, sowing discord and division, attacking fellow believers. Some people that are like that, they pick on something that a preacher said and magnify it or exaggerate it or totally misunderstand it.

Take it wrongly. And then they start attacking the man. And that's the devil, isn't it? The accuser of the brethren. This is not biblical discernment, being like the spiritual police.

[ 4 : 34 ] It's really the flesh. It's pride. And it's wrong. It's the enemy's tactics. So we're going to unpack a little of that too. But the focus really is rather biblical discernment.

We want that. We want that above all things. That love that grows, that judgment that grows, not to be in the camp of the critics for the sake of being critical.

So what is discernment then? What is it? It's the ability to tell the real from the false, the counterfeit, as it were, as the bank teller. To recognise truth, even when the lie is wrapped in scripture and smiles.

There's a lot of cults out there. A lot of cultic churches. A lot of cultic pastors. What is not discernment? It's not a critical spirit. It's not nitpicking.

It's not being negative. You know, there's a difference between a watchdog that protects the house, that protects the family, protects the home, and an attack dog that bites everything that means.

[ 5 : 36 ] I think sometimes when we go door knocking, there's a lot of attack dogs out there. I like the fact that they're behind a screen door. They're going to bite you. They're a man-eating dog.

They're an attack dog. Of course, we want to be watchdogs. We want to be, as the prophets are meant to be, a guard dog that protects the home. A watchdog, a watchman, but not an attack dog where it just attacks everything that moves, bites everything that moves.

So biblical discernment. What is that? It's seeing things as God sees them. It's testing everything by scripture. It's rejecting error. And it's doing it with a humble, loving heart.

Yes, we want to be right. We want to be very narrow and straight down the line and very biblical.

But we want to keep the loving heart about it. It's important, isn't it? That balance there.

And so God calls us to discern. We must learn to discern. It's a spiritual quality. It's a spiritual practice that we're all called to be. Those that are discerning believers.

[ 6 : 42 ] To discern. Don't just swallow anything. We must prove all things it tells us there. 1 Thessalonians 5.21 Hold fast that, which is good.

Proof. There it means to test, to examine, to verify. It's like a jeweler would examine the gold and make sure it is gold. It is real. It's the true gold.

Not just accepting something just because it sparkles. A lot of people are following after that which sparkles. But we must prove all things.

And secondly there, we must try the spirits. Beloved, believe not every spirit. But try the spirits whether they are of God.

It's the same word for prove in the first one. To prove. Don't be gullible. Don't mistake emotion for anointing or eloquence for truth.

[ 7 : 37 ] Not every spiritual sounding voice comes from God. Got to be very discerning. Especially these days. So many voices out there on the internet, isn't there? That we can tune into and they might sound very attractive and very persuasive.

But we must try the spirits. And thirdly, we must discern both good and evil. It tells us that there, Hebrews 5.14, that we want to be meat eaters.

We want to have our senses exercised. We want to be able to discern both good and evil. There's a sense where we practice that. We discern. It's a spiritual muscle discernment.

And it grows through practice, through testing. Keep on doing it. And your senses are going to get exercised. Believers, young believers, older believers, we all need to keep our senses alert to discern good and evil.

As that spiritual muscle, comparing things with scripture, testing, evaluating. Is it the real gold or is it fool's gold? We must discern and prove. And now there's an important point here that love and judgment must grow together.

[ 8 : 45 ] Paul's prayer in Philippians 1. Love and judgment.

Love needs to abound. Knowledge and judgment also needs to abound. And love without discernment is naive.

People can say, fall in love with something, with someone, and it's a trap if they don't exercise discernment. Love and discernment go together. We must have the both. Discernment without love is cruel.

Some, it's very discerning, but there's no love there. And that's cruel, isn't it? God wants the both.

Tender hearts and sharp minds. We're called to speak the truth in love.

Ephesians 4.15. Speak the truth in love. Tenderly, graciously, firmly. Now, warning people is not unloving.

[ 9 : 58 ] Some people say, oh, you're being too judgmental. Oh, your church is judgmental. You're legalistic. You're judgmental. Some would say that, even of our church. But warning is not unloving.

It's caring. You can imagine if an engineer discovers there's a crack in the bridge. Is it loving for this man to stay quiet? Oh, we don't want to disturb people driving along.

But no, staying silent is cruel. The loving thing is to say, hey, stop. The bridge is unsafe. Don't drive your family there. Don't try to drive your family across this bridge. It's dangerous. And it's the same with warning people about doctrine, isn't it?

With teachings, warning people it saves lives. The same is true spiritually as well. So what then is the source of true discernment?

[10:56] Of course, it's the Bible. The Bible. In a way, the Bible is our lens, isn't it? Oh, you look very blurry out there. Oh, no.

The light goes on. It's like the Bible is the lens. The Bible is the lens. Oh, I could do with that sometimes. It says Julie's little toy.

The Bible is like a lens. Okay? And it tells us, Psalm 119, 130, The entrance of thy words giveth light. It giveth understanding unto the simple.

Without Scripture, everything is blurry, isn't it? We need the Bible. We've got to be a biblical church. And also, discernment is not negativity. Some people think, oh, you're a negative church.

You're always finding something to say this is wrong. Well, it's not negativity for negativity's sake. We're not about hunting faults. Look, if I looked in the mirror for five seconds, I'd find lots of faults.

[12:03] It's not hunting faults. There's lots of faults in this man here. And it's not judging by our personal tastes as well. It's not about a negativity per se. And also, discernment asks, what saith the Scripture?

That's what matters. It's not asking, what do I like? Or what feels familiar? Or what do others expect? What does the Scripture say? That's the measure, isn't it?

That is the measure. Does it match the Bible? That's what matters. What saith the Scripture? That should be our guide. And also, discernment is from the Spirit, not from the flesh.

It's the spiritual thing to do. The Bible says the Holy Spirit, He is the Spirit of truth. He is truth, personified. The Spirit of truth, He is come.

And He will guide you into all truth. He gives clarity. He gives peace. He gives humility. It's a spiritual thing. Discernment is a good thing. It's from the Holy Spirit.

[13:04] And God helps us to discern things spiritually, as it talks about in 1 Corinthians 2, 14. Discern things spiritually. They're spiritually discerned. Look in contrast to what the Spirit does, to what the flesh does.

The flesh. And the flesh, what does it produce? Pride, not humility. Arguments instead of answers. Contention instead of peace.

And harshness instead of grace. The Bible talks about such things as contentions, of strivings, quarrels. Here's a good way to check yourself.

If your discernment makes you feel superior, it's not from God. It's pride. It's pride in disguise. I can be guilty of that. I think I'm so right on something, and I get prideful, and I look down on others.

It's not following the truth. But when you peel it back, peel back the layers, it's pride there. It's pride, isn't it? It's arrogance. It's the flesh.

[14:08] We've got to crucify that. When that's the discernment, it's pride. We've got to crucify that, brother, sister. So check yourself on that one. Why do we need discernment? Because there's a lot of error out there.

Error masquerades as truth. So Satan himself, he's disguised to look good. Satan likes to disguise himself, as we read there in 2 Corinthians 11, 14, for no marvel.

For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Wow, he's so spiritual. He's so angelic. Full of light. Dazzling. Bright.

And his lives look so spiritual. They look so kind and helpful. See, many that are deceived and following the devil's ways and they're innocently deceived.

They're blindly deceived because they see the devil as an angel of light and their eyes are dazzled by that. We've got to watch that. Always got to be careful. And when you think, the deadliest lies are mixed with truth.

[15:12] It's like you get a bottle and it might have all kinds of sweet-tasting water in it or accordion or a soft drink but add 10% poison and it's deadly.

It's deadly, but it's 90% good. No, it's the 10% that's the problem. And it's like that with false cults where they use Bible words, Bible verses, Bible stories, but they twist them.

They twist them and it makes it all wrong. The deadliest lies are mixed with truth. Another aspect is that false teachers look sincere.

It tells of some having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof from such turn away. Think of false teachers and they're all over the place. They sound kind. They smile. They appear godly. They may be sincere, but they're sincerely wrong. There's this religious shell, but they're denying the power. Inside, they're teaching poison.

[16:21] And false cults look like this. I know you could illustrate it by thinking of a tool shed where the dad might have just innocently filled up a cordial bottle with some poison, something toxic.

And the child goes there thinking it's a bottle of cordial, glug, glug, glug, but they're drinking something toxic. They're sincere, but they're sincerely wrong.

It's the same with cults. But we can think that, we can sincerely think, looks good, sounds good, it's got the right label, but we can be sincerely wrong.

So we've got to always exercise discernment with everything. False cults can look sincere, false teachers. And this is how we cannot judge teaching.

We've got to be careful not to use these measures to judge teaching. How it makes us feel. There's some cults that might make people feel really good. Mega churches, where it's just full of a lot of emotion.

[17:29] It makes people feel good. Don't judge things about how excited people get. Masses of people go to hear false teachers at times. Not saying every big gathering is wrong, but don't measure teaching by how popular it is.

Or how nice the teacher seems. It might be very convincing. Or how contemporary it sounds. Emotionalism does not equal truth. Millions of people can be, and often are, wrong.

And Satan himself is very charming. And you might say, well, it's something new. Error updates with every generation. It's been said, the new age is the old lie.

It's the lie of Genesis 3. It's the lie of, hath God said, the new age is the old lie. You shall be as gods. It's not really a new thing.

It's old. It's the devil's lie. And he just updates error for every generation. He changes its clothes. It's a different disguise.

[18:35] And Satan just repackages things, doesn't he? As time goes by. But really, it's the same lies he's always been telling. And we judge by one standard, scripture.

We judge by scripture. That must be our measure, our standard. One standard, scripture, period. Let's think about three areas that we must exercise discernment.

Discernment in doctrine, the teaching. Is the teaching right? And then we'll look also at daily life and at church life. But firstly, discernment in doctrine.

We must discern the difference between the true gospel or a false gospel. Is it believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved? Or is it believe on Jesus plus our rules?

That's a false gospel. Is it real salvation versus works-based salvation? Is it by grace through faith? Or is it plus your performance?

[19:38] Works-based is false. Is it genuine Bible teaching? Or is it human opinions? What God says in his word or what sounds good?

We've got to exercise discernment in doctrine. And we have to go to the word of God to measure things. You get the measuring stick out.

And it tells you what the measurements are. It tells you how to tell what the measure is. The rule. And the Bible is the rule of faith and conduct. It's the ruler.

It's the measuring stick. And it tells us in Isaiah 8 verse 20, to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to, this word, it is because there is no light in them.

So we must actually question things. And here's three questions that you could ask about any teaching. Here's a helpful kind of measure, if you like. A helpful measure about is this teaching right?

[20:38] Does it actually line up with Scripture? Is it actually in Scripture? Is this rightly divided? In other words, don't mix up or misapply verses.

You've got to use correct meanings. You've got to use the context. Is it rightly divided? And then thirdly, is this teaching consistent with the rest of the Bible?

Although just grabbing one little proof text out of accord with the whole Bible and trying to make it say something that it doesn't say. So we must be wise and exercise discernment in doctrine.

Secondly, we must exercise discernment in daily life. Now, there's so many lies out there and these are common things that people tell us and the world tells you lies every single day when you

actually think about it.

For example, follow your heart. Follow your heart. But as the Bible says, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? So don't follow your heart.

[ 21 : 40 ] You can be self-deceived. Don't follow your heart. And then someone's saying, well, your truth is your truth. Everybody's got their truth. But that makes truth meaningless because truth is truth.

It doesn't budge. The truth is the truth. There's no changing of the truth. It is the truth. It was the truth. It always will be the truth. Not your truth is your truth as if truth changes.

Another lie the world would say is if it feels good, just do it. which is simply permission to sin. No. Some things the Bible tells us not to do.

And then some would say, oh, don't judge me. You're getting judgy. Don't judge. Really, the world doesn't want people judging biblical morality. They don't want the Bible truth.

So they say don't judge. And these are all lies, really, that we should expose. And we're called to discern, to purity, to honesty, to integrity, to self-control.

[ 22 : 44 ] Biblical principles. These are things the world would say, oh, that's outdated. But it's biblical. It's real. It's timeless.

Righteousness is righteousness. And when you think, brother, sister, that we all need discernment, for example, in areas like these. You need discernment for friendships.

Do my friendships draw me to Christ? Or the opposite? We need discernment for entertainment.

Am I laughing at sin?

Am I just watching whatever's feeding me through the box? Am I laughing at sin? Or some crude joke or something that's of question?

Entertainment. Need discernment for that. Relationships. Is this relationship good for my soul?

Finances. Is this wisdom or greed? What I'm spending my money on?

[ 23 : 43 ] My career. Is this God's leading? Or am I just doing what I want? Just doing my own thing. Is it God's leading? We need discernment in all of these aspects of life, don't we?

And the Bible says, So you've got two things here. You've got the simple, in other words, the fool. They just go along with anything.

Just follow anybody. They believe so much. They're gullible, the simple, the foolish. They believe every word. But the prudent, in other words, the one who's wise and prudent, careful, they watch out where they're going.

They mind their steps. They're going to be careful. And so we need discernment in daily life. And thirdly, we need discernment in church life as well to tell the difference between unity and compromise.

For example, as a godly church, we'll have a godly unity about the essentials that we agree on there. Then compromise says nothing is essential.

[ 24 : 46 ] We don't want to be compromising. We've got to have biblical unity. The next one, we must learn to tell the difference between correction and cruelty.

Now, correction aims to restore. It's got a heart to restore people, whereas cruelty aims to destroy. And we can be, as any church can be, heavy-handed with church discipline without exercising kindness and compassion.

But that's a problem, isn't it? Of course, we need church discipline. It's the right thing to have church discipline, but how we exercise it must be exercised with kindness and compassion.

Now, some are very narrow as well about definitions which cause unnecessary divisions. Making these off, unless you agree with every word of this statement without any deviation, then you don't belong.

And it becomes an unnecessary division. And then you see the third one there, loyalty. Find the difference between loyalty and blind following.

[ 25 : 51 ] So, loyalty, we want to be a church that's faithful, we belong together, we're loyal, we support one another, we're heading in the right direction, we're supporting godly leadership, but we're not blindly following where it might be leading us into error or sin, and we've got to be careful about that.

So, godly leadership is a good thing, but we don't want to be following blindly and be willing to question. Even for Paul, they said that they searched the scriptures to see if these things were so.

They questioned in a good way. Another truth is that we should not be filled by appearances. This is what happens with cults and domineering leaders. Don't be filled by appearances.

So, personality, not every strong personality is a good leader. Diotrophies. He had a strong personality. He liked to have the preeminence, diotrophies, but he was really a troublemaker, caused a lot of harm.

Talent can be not always a good measure as well. Lucifer was the most talented song leader. He was at the top of the tree. He would have been at the top of the CCM charts nowadays because of his talent.

[ 27 : 04 ] Lucifer, don't be filled by appearances. Don't be filled by every smooth-talking teacher because often the more polished actually not alike to the faithful.

The smooth-talking, don't be filled by polish and then don't be filled by popularity too. Just because everybody else thinks it's a good church or it's a good ministry, it doesn't mean that it's blessed of God.

Not everything that's popular is necessarily right because we know the wide is the gate that leads to destruction. We've got to exercise discernment. And when you think about discernment, godly discernment, it brings protection.

It's going to help us to be stronger as a church. Godly discernment. The Lord Jesus, he says, judge righteous judgment. In other words, he doesn't say never judge.

He says, judge correctly. There's right judgment. There's righteous judgment. And we think about righteous judgment of discernment. It protects the church family. There's predators.

[ 28 : 05 ] There's false teaching. There's division. But the immune system of the body is this truth of protection of discernment. It helps the body not get sick and keep healthy.

So we want to judge correctly. Righteous judgment. And just on the theme of the opposite of judging righteously is having a critical spirit.

A critical spirit. Discernment builds but a critical spirit tears down. I'm kind of glad when people leave who have got a critical spirit.

They're just picking on something and making a fuss, sowing discord or division, causing hurt, attacking people, picking on things that are not true and causing much destruction.

A critical spirit versus biblical discernment. They're different things. Okay? So a critical spirit, they look for flaws in people. Oh, they're like this all the time.

[ 29 : 08 ] Oh, caught them doing something. They're looking for flaws in people. Whereas biblical discernment looks for truth and error. Hey, what's true? What's not true? The critical spirit focuses on personalities.

Whereas the biblical discernment focuses on doctrine, on truth, on godly behaviour. A critical spirit speaks before thinking.

Just attacks. Whereas biblical discernment is slow to speak, it's quick to pray. Actually, I want to be prayerful about this. I could be wrong. I could be misunderstanding.

There's grace there. All right? The critical spirit divides over preferences. Oh, they're doing such and such that I don't think they should be doing. Makes a division over it.

Whereas biblical discernment protects the flock from error. Hey, we want to protect the flock. This is about guarding. It's about looking after people. A critical spirit enjoys tearing things down, tearing people down.

[ 30 : 10 ] Whereas the biblical discernment wants to build up the church. Let all things be done unto edifying. Let all things be done unto constructing. Unto building up the church. Building up other people.

A critical spirit is rooted in pride. It's prideful. Huh. They don't do it my way so they must be wrong. Whereas biblical discernment it's got humility.

Hey, we're all in this together. We're all learning. We're all growing. We're all becoming more like Him. So it's a big difference there, isn't it? It's a good kind of comparison.

We want to be on the biblical discernment side. Amen? That's a good place to be. And so then, how to cultivate biblical discernment. Here's some tips. How can we develop this biblical discernment, this good kind of judgment?

Saturate your mind with scriptures. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Fill your mind. Fill your heart. Fill your memory with God's word. Then you'll know the right thing because the right thing will be God's thing that you'll know the scriptures.

[ 31 : 13 ] He'll bring it to your mind. And so saturate your mind with scripture and again, let the Bible be a measuring stick. You cannot measure truth without a standard. We've got a standard.

It's the Bible. The Bible is our standard. That's the measuring and that helps us with discernment. Without it, we don't have discernment. So to cultivate discernment, read your Bible every day. Read it to know God. Let the word rewire your thinking, your mind. Saturate your mind with the scripture. Another one, pray for wisdom and not just knowledge.

We can have a lot of wisdom that is good or we can have a lot of knowledge that may not always be good. But if you lack wisdom, the Bible says, ask of God.

Ask for it and God will give it. And God promises to give us wisdom. What a promise from God. Do we use that one? Do we claim that? He gives it.

[ 32 : 10 ] He gives it generously there. Pray, God, keep me from deception. Give me clarity. Give me that wisdom that I need. And also, stay humble.

Stay humble because pride blinds people. A proud Christian cannot be discerning because pride filters everything through.

Am I right? Oh, how dare you even think otherwise? Am I right? Of course I am. Instead of, what is right?

Let's be humble. All right? And the moment you think you've arrived, the moment you think you've got it all figured out, that you're above being deceived, that's the moment you're in the most danger, isn't it?

So stay humble, stay teachable, be willing to be corrected. It's a good place to be, isn't it? Keep that humble heart. I look back on some of the things I preached like 10 years ago and I think, I probably disagree with that man.

[ 33 : 14 ] I'm still learning. There's stuff I'm learning, there's stuff I'm learning, there's stuff that I think, oh, actually I've learnt something over the last 20 odd years preaching that, hey, we can all learn.

But when we get prideful, we don't have that capacity anymore and it blinds us. Another truth is, test everything by the word.

Don't accept teaching just because it's in a Christian book, especially the top 10 at Kurong, because books can be wrong, all right? I don't accept any teaching just because, oh, the pastor said it, so it must be right, without question.

No, test the pastor, test me. Don't accept teaching just because it's on Christian radio and everybody's going along with it. Even, don't accept teaching just because your parents believed it, as much as I know my parents are pretty smart.

But no, there's the truth that, we've got to be careful, don't we? Test everything. Is it actually in the scripture? If I had to, can I show someone from the Bible itself about this teaching that I can explain it?

[ 34 : 29 ] If I believe it, I should be able to explain it and go to the Bible to tell others about it. So test everything by the word and compare scripture with scripture. This is crucial.

You don't build a doctrine on one verse. Some cults, they grab one verse out of context usually. They ignore the 20 others about it and they build a whole entire religion on it.

For example, as we talked about, judge not. It's in one verse. And people, they take that out of context. But the Bible has dozens of verses commanding us to judge, to test, to discern.

So compare scripture with scripture. And another truth is seek wise counsel as well from godly trusted believers. Go to mature believers and bounce things off of them.

Lone ranger Christianity is dangerous. Lone rangers. We've had some lone rangers. They've come and gone. They're going on. They're home on the range. They're lone rangers.

[ 35 : 29 ] They just go, flit here, flit there. They don't have roots down. It's dangerous. They don't have accountability. The Bible says, the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

We need other believers in our lives. We need the body of believers. Another thing about discernment is look at the fruit. The Lord Jesus says, by their fruits you shall know them.

Matthew 7, 20. Is the teaching producing over time good fruit? People are growing in holiness. They're fighting sin. They're not excusing it.

They're growing in humility. They realise their need for the Lord. They're growing in obedience. They're actually doing what Scripture says. They're growing in their love for God. They want to

know him and not just facts about him.

There's good fruit. Or is it bad fruit? Pride. Only we have the truth. Everyone else is wrong. Pride. Confusion.

[ 36 : 29 ] I don't know what to believe anymore. Licence to sin. Grace means I can live however I want. Uh-uh. Chaos. There's drama.

There's division. Instability. Think about the fruit. If the teaching produces bad fruit over time, it's bad teaching. Another angle to consider when you're wanting discernment, keep a clean heart. Keep your own heart right. We can get so right that we think everybody else is wrong. We can have bitterness. It's like a dirty lens. Everything's cloudy.

You can't discern. When bitterness gets in the way and you see problems that aren't there and you magnify, you amplify things and division comes. You see anger where you'll be harsh when you should be gentle and kind.

Anger. It's the flesh again, isn't it? Jealousy. When you tear down people because you want to be above them. Unconfessed sin. You'll defend error to justify yourself.

[ 37 : 35 ] You'll excuse it in yourself but not in others. And so we've got to be careful about all these things, don't we? To keep short accounts with God. Confess our sin quickly. Spiritual garbage can pile up and it distorts everything that we see.

So let's exercise discernment. And really the goal that especially I'd like to emphasise is discerning love.

It's discerning love. Because true discernment is not cold and harsh. It's warm, it's wise, it's Christ-like. It cares about people, not just principles.

So discernment helps us to love better. Philippians 1.9 Grow in knowledge, in understanding, in the context of love. Love, abounding love, discernment.

It makes you a better friend, a better spouse, parent. Because you love people enough to speak the truth in love. Discernment, it protects unity. Will you spot false teaching enough that you'll address it gently?

[ 38 : 38 ] Before it becomes a wildfire, it's like preventative medicine, isn't it? So we don't just excuse. If there's some error, we want to protect the unity because our object is love.

Discernment, it guards the weak. New believers are vulnerable. We've got to help one another, the ones who might be more susceptible to spiritual predators. Discernment keeps our witness strong, our testimony.

When we live with wisdom in this careless world, our testimony shines brighter because we're actually exercising discernment. People can see here we're standing for the truth.

We care about what's right and we're doing it in love. So we'll shine brighter for Jesus. And then we see discernment makes us more like him. And that's the ultimate goal, isn't it?

That would be more like our saviour. Now of course our saviour, he never compromised truth but he never stopped loving people. He called the Pharisees vipers and he died for them.

[ 39 : 38 ] He had perfect discernment and perfect love, operating in perfect harmony. That is our aim. So just a final picture we think of this comparison between a critical spirit and a godly discernment.

A critical spirit is like a butcher's cleaver. It hacks and destroys. A butcher has a critical spirit. Now I'm not offending any butchers present but just using that as an illustration.

But the butcher just cares about cutting up the meat. It hacks. Whereas godly discernment is like the surgeon's scalpel. It cuts precisely only when necessary and with the object to heal.

So you could think well it's same blade, same action, cutting but a completely different heart isn't it? That we have a completely different result. We're not about being a butcher we're about being a surgeon.

Removing the cancer. And so think of that, think of that context of love. Our object is to heal, to bless. And love makes all the difference.

[ 40 : 52 ] And when love leads your discernment, it's like this compass isn't it? That it leads us. When love leads us, complaining dies, gratitude grows, our words are controlled, the unity flourishes, our light shines brighter.

So love warns, love heals, love restores. Let me ask you in closing, are you developing biblical discernment? Hey, we don't excuse error.

We want to spot it, address it, with love. Can you spot error? Do you test everything by the scriptures? What does the scripture say?

Are you growing in wisdom? Or are you drifting, just accepting whatever sounds good, following whoever's popular, believing whatever feels right? If you're not growing in discernment, you're open to deception.

So here's the truth this morning. If you've become harsh, critical, fault finding, you swap discernment for pride. Recognise that.

[ 41 : 57 ] I have to recognise pride in myself. I'm my own worst enemy. And we always have to guard against pride. It's subtle and it creeps up on us, doesn't it?

And we think we're so right when we're so wrong. Pride. Rather choose wisdom over ignorance. Choose love over harshness.

Choose truth over self-comfort. Choose discernment over laziness. Apply your mind. Open your Bible. Pray for wisdom. Test everything.

Stay humble. Keep your heart clean. Do all things without murmuring and disputings. The devil loves discord. And we might think, oh, I'm being so right. I'm exercising biblical discernment.

No, it's the critical spirit thing. I've got to watch that. When you spot error, handle it like Jesus does, firmly, truthfully, lovingly.

[ 42 : 55 ] And especially watch yourself. I'm preaching to myself today. And so the Bible tells us, the psalmist says, teach me good judgment. In other words, good discernment and knowledge.

For I believe thy commandments. Ask the Lord to teach you, how can I be a discerning Christian? That I'm going to, actually I'm not going to be sucked in, not going to be gullible to whatever the latest fad is, the latest bandwagon that people jump on.

I'm actually going to go with what the Bible says and be consistent and be led by the scripture, by his spirit. And not be murmuring and disputing, making a fuss about every little difference and sowing discord in the process, but have good judgment, good judgment.

And may the Lord make us a church that knows the truth so well that lies cannot fool us. We'll have discernment and we'll love people so deeply that truth never makes us harsh.

Because the love and the truth, they go together. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you. That your word is that measuring ruler, that rule of faith and conduct. We know you want your church strong, biblical, pure, our doctrine sound, our truth untainted by lies.

[ 44 : 13 ] Especially, Lord, you speak to our hearts. We pray if there's any here present yet to trust you that will find the way, the truth and the life. They'll know the love that took you to Calvary's hill to pay for our sin.

Lord, we can know that assurance today that we can know eternal life by trusting in you. Pray each one might have that heart's assurance today to know you as saviour.

And help us, Lord, to walk in these truths that will exercise godly discernment, that will test things. And Lord, you'll guide us to apply our mind to continue to grow, to have our senses exercised, that we'll discern better and better.

And we won't do it in a fault finding, hard, critical, hard-nosed way that hurts people. Lord, we'll do it in a way that glorifies you, that lifts up one another, so we'll all grow together, abounding more and more in love.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.