

Your Immunity to Deceivers

1 John 2:18-27 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise that He has promised us -- eternal life. ²⁶ ¶ These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. ²⁷ But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

If you met a man who told you he was very discerning, you might ask him for an example of his discernment. And if he told you that he is always able to tell the difference between night and day, you would become sceptical of his claim to be discerning. Discernment is not merely the ability to discern between right and wrong, when the difference is as conspicuous as night and day. Discernment is the ability to make fine distinctions where the situation is a murky grey. This is why people of discernment are highly valued in every area of life. This is also why discernment in the spiritual realm is something that God gives to us as a gift.

The amount of error which surrounds us today requires discernment. That's because the system of truth which God has given us is not always plainly simple. It has many facets to it. The potential to pervert it is limitless. What is critical is discernment.

As John continues to give us Signs of Life, he moves to an important sign of life in a Christian, and that is discernment. Nothing is more catastrophic to this eternal life that he is talking about, than the perversion of the gospel. Therefore, discernment becomes absolutely critical for the believer.

In this passage, John is going to tell us three things. He'll show us that discernment is especially needed in the last days. He'll show us that discernment is a gift God gives His people. He'll also show us that discernment is something to be grown.

I. Discernment is needed in the Last Days

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

John tells us it is the last hour. The last hour means it is the last period of time on God's calendar before the return of Christ. So even though this was written 1900 years ago, it is still that last hour. And you can be at the beginning of an hour, in the middle of an hour, or towards the end of the hour. So John tells us how we know it is the last hour. At the very end of the last hour comes the Antichrist – the man of lawlessness who exalts himself as God. And like the labour pains before the actual birth, we are to expect little antichrists before the final antichrist. And it would seem, the more of them we see, the closer we know we are to the very end of the last hour.

Matthew 24:5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

Matthew 24:11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

Jude 1:18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.

When you put a pot of water on the stove and turn the heat up, you wait for it to boil. And one of the first signs is a bit of steam coming off the top, and perhaps some tiny bubbles forming. But by the time the water is bubbling furiously, you know the water has boiled. So the question before us is, do we see a lot of false teachers around us today?

Let's remind ourselves of what we saw about them:

- a) They emerge from within the church. "They went out from us,"
- b) They do not remain within gospel-teaching Christianity, because they do not believe the gospel. That means they are not saved. *"they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."*
- c) *They deny the gospel itself. " 22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also."*
- d) They try to deceive others to believe their false gospel. *"These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you."*

How many of these people do we see today? We have cults by the hundreds.. With the internet, you can no longer keep track of the heresies: literally billions of words of gospel-denying teaching are being poured out over the Internet. And John reminds us of something which this big ecumenical movement will not accept: *"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also."*

Jesus Christ, as He proclaimed Himself, stands in the way of a one-world religion. And if you want to be part of that one big amorphous religion, then deny that Jesus is the Christ – that He alone is the Saviour. The problem is, once you do that, you no longer have the Father. You can talk about God, our God, the one God, the Great Intelligence, the Higher Power, The Elevated Being, but you don't have the Father.

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

John 15:23 "He who hates Me hates My Father also.

Do you realise that God uses the departures of false teachers as a teaching lesson? He allows those who deny the gospel to go out from gospel-preaching churches, so that true Christians can know what is false and what is not. God allows a separation that is healthy. If false teachers and false brethren remained in the church, you would have an impure church. While departures and splits unnerve us, the Bible assures us that it is part of God's plan.

1 Corinthians 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

He allows it to alert us: This is the last hour, and discernment is needed more than ever. But then comes the encouraging, and perhaps convicting, truth taught in verses 20-21 and 27

II. Discernment is Given to All True Believers vv20-21, 27

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

John tells us that you, addressing true believers, have an anointing. In both verse 20 and verse 27, we learn that this anointing is from Him, the Holy One. Who is the Holy One? Do you remember what the demons said when Jesus cast them out?

Mark 1:24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!"

True believers have received an anointing from Jesus Christ. Now look very carefully at what this anointing **does**. **If we know what this anointing does**, we will be able to understand what it is. Look in verse 20. What does the anointing do? The second part of the verse implies what the anointing does. "You know all things." Now because of a textual variant, some translations are going to render it – All of you know, you all have knowledge. Both translations are within orthodoxy, if we understand them correctly. Either way, something about the anointing brings knowledge, possibly a full and complete kind of knowledge. How many Christians have received this anointing? All.

Look at verse 27.

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things,

What does the anointing do? It teaches you concerning all things, and you do not need anyone to teach you. This anointing that Jesus gives believers, teaches them knowledge, a full and complete kind of knowledge. Now, can you think of anything that Jesus promised He would give us that would teach us? Can you think of anything that Jesus said He would apply to us, like anointing oil was poured on the kings and priests and prophets of old, something that would enable us to know the truth?

John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

John 16:13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

The Holy Spirit Himself. When you are born into the family of God, at that moment, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you. His ministry includes making plain to you spiritual truths. The very truths of the gospel make sense to you because of the Holy Spirit's presence within you.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶ For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

The result of this is another sign of eternal life. True believers have at least this much discernment: true believers know the true gospel. That's what makes them believers.

Why have the false teachers gone out from among us? Because they were not of us. So why have

you remained? Because the Holy Spirit has taught you the gospel, and you know it to be true. You have it in your heart. It is not a matter of intelligence. Believers, no matter how simple or brilliant they may be, have the Spirit of God teaching them and confirming to them the truths of the gospel.

John 10:1-5 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. "But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

God's sheep know the Shepherd's voice in the true gospel. When they hear a false gospel, the anointing they have received alerts them that this is the voice of a stranger.

Warren Wiersbe tells of a missionary to the American Indians who was in Los Angeles with an Indian friend, who was a new Christian. As they walked down the street, they approached a man on a street corner with a Bible in his hand, who was preaching. The missionary knew that this 'preacher' was actually the member of a cult, and was preaching a false gospel. But his Indian friend saw the Bible in his hand, and stopped to listen. The missionary silently prayed that he would not be confused by the cultist. After a few minutes, the young Christian turned away from the preacher and rejoined his missionary friend. The missionary asked him, "What did you think of his message?" The Indian replied, "All the time he was talking, something in my heart kept saying, 'Liar! Liar! Liar!'"

The fact that Christians already have this God-given discernment is the reason John writes to them:

I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

He's saying, if you didn't already know the true gospel, my letter wouldn't make sense to you. But I write to you because you have believed the gospel, so this ministry of the Holy Spirit is operative in your life, so that these words make sense.

It is like this: I say to you, I do not need to teach you English, because you already understand English. If you didn't understand English, nothing I'm saying would make sense to you. But the reason this does make sense to you is that you speak English. So, John says, I write to you about the truth of the gospel, not because you don't understand it, but because you do. That's what makes you a Christian.

2 Peter 1:12 ¶ For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.

I'm going to come back to what John means by 'you do not need that any man should teach you'. However, like we see again and again in the New Testament – we are told to become what we are. We must practise something of our position. God has given us something graciously, but we have some responsibility.

III. Discernment Must Be Developed

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has

taught you, you will abide in Him.

So here amongst the warning that we need discernment for the last days, and the promise that we have discernment in the indwelling Holy Spirit, comes a command to do something so as to maintain our discernment and persevere in the faith.

Discernment is God-given and man-driven. God gives discernment, not like a passive download into your head, but as you apply yourself to means. There are certain things God wants you to do to grow your discernment:

Discernment is grounded on apostolic doctrine. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. What does John mean? The beginning of what? Well more than likely, the beginning of their Christian lives. They heard the gospel. They heard it from the pages of the New Testament – that apostles' doctrine. And John encourages believers to abide in it. Remain in the Word of God. Remain attached to the old truths of Scripture that have been taught and held onto for centuries. That's why we recited the Nicene Creed this morning. That's the old time gospel. Beware of novelty. Beware of those who come along saying that the church has had it wrong all these years. Justification by faith alone is not what we have said it means. It means something else. Emergents want to tell us that we have all missed original Christianity and they are restoring it for us. Every cult has some prophet who tells us that he or she has received fresh divine revelation which will correct the gospel, and correct the apostolic teaching. No, John says, stay in the gospel once delivered to all the saints. Dr Harry Ironside used to say, "If it's new it's not true, and if it's true it's not new."

Discernment is grown in communion with God Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

Abiding in Christ. A major theme in 1 John and in the Gospel of John. Be in Christ positionally – be in Him, get in the Vine through initial repentance and faith, but then remain in Him practically - walk with Him; commune with Him; maintain a life of communing with Him.

We have this idea that discernment is a matter of head-knowledge. We think that if we get enough books and get enough facts into our heads, that we will have discernment. Well, the problem with that is – you need discernment to read those books in the first place! You need discernment to choose which books to read! Discernment is not like a jug, and if you pour in the water of information, you are full of discernment. No. Discernment is like a filter. Pouring more water into a filter doesn't make it a better filter. It has got to be a good filter before you pour water into it.

You see, discernment is not knowledge. Discernment is judgement – it is what you do with knowledge. It is a way of thinking. It is a kind of thinking. It is how you process it. It is a kind of thinking. It is a right kind of thinking that processes the information properly. A bad kind of thinking will keep coming up with the wrong answers every time.

That is why a Christian with some problem in his or her life will go for counsel to two different Christians who both have exactly the same facts or knowledge in their minds. But those two Christians may give completely different answers. The reason for those different answers is the way those Christians think and judge matters. It is whether or not they have what the Bible calls an understanding heart.

Well, where does that ability to judge and discern come from? What did Solomon say?

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

What comes first? Devotion or discernment? When the devotion is present, the discernment follows. This is not to take anything away from the first point that discernment is grounded in the Word of God. Devotion that neglects the Scriptures is not devotion at all. But discernment does not come to a cold heart which is simply looking for abstract principles and methods and techniques to fix its problems, or maybe to set other people straight.

When you abide in Christ, you are living in an obedient, dependent relationship. Your ultimate dependence and devotion and delight are in God alone. When you live like this, saturated with the Scriptures, delighting in God, you are going to be judging like God judges.

Hebrews 5:12-14 ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Discernment is grounded on the Scriptures. It is grown in communion with God. And it is guarded within the church of God.

Discernment is guarded within the community of faith.

But what does John mean by '“you do not need that any man should teach you”'. Every now and then you will meet someone who tells you he doesn't need the church, or preaching or pastoral guidance, because 1 John 2:27 says that you do not need that anyone should teach you. Does this verse mean that Christians don't need teaching? Well, the most obvious reason why this cannot be the case is that John is writing them a letter in which he is teaching them! So if Christians do not need teaching, it is rather strange of John to write this 5-chapter letter to them instructing them.

We know from many New Testament Scriptures that teaching is essential to the Christian.

Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

John is not teaching that Christians have perfect knowledge, or else the New Testament itself would be redundant. The Bible would not tell us to grow in knowledge if in fact we already knew it all. John is not telling us that we receive direct revelation and new truth the way the apostles did. John is not telling us that we, Christians, are infallible, otherwise we would never disagree on the Bible. He is saying that Christians understand the gospel; otherwise they would not be Christians at all. Regardless of ability, the anointing of the Spirit means every Christian understands the gospel. The Spirit's ministry in us continues to give us discernment on all the matters of life and godliness.

However, discernment is not something we learn by being lone rangers. Matters of judgement are the kinds of things that we learn by being around people who judge correctly. Where did you learn table manners from? Where did you learn modesty from? Where did you learn not to interrupt? Where did you learn acceptable social habits or conversation from? You learnt them by observing and being around others. These are matters of judgement.

In the church of God, as we frequently gather around the Scriptures, we learn discernment. We learn how to interpret the Scriptures. We learn better ways of applying Scripture. We learn how to counsel one another. We learn proportion, measure, good sense, wise decisions. We avoid extremes. We avoid hobby-horses and quirks. We only do that because we humble ourselves enough to say my judgement is bound to be off somewhere. I need balance. I need retuning. I need sharpening. I need exposure to good judgement. I need examples of good judgement. The local church is where I guard my discernment. In fact, it is where I gauge my discernment to see if I have gone off on a tangent.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise.

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.

Jesus said, "John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

If you are one of His, then you have heard His voice, and you believe the gospel. However, you need to keep developing that discernment for these last days. Ground your discernment in the Word of God. Grow your discernment in an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. And guard your discernment by being within the local church.