



Spiritual Warfare: Pulling Down Strongholds

HEBREWS 5:11-14

LESSON 14 – LEARN TO DISCERN – PART 2

PASTOR PHILLIP M WAY

UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, ALL SCRIPTURE TAKEN FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. COPYRIGHT © 1982 BY THOMAS NELSON, INC. USED BY PERMISSION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Discernment

- ▶ Discernment is the ability to know the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, the sound and unsound. In the Old Testament it is referred to as “understanding.” In the New Testament it is spoken of as knowing the difference between sound and unsound doctrine, recognizing the differences between the truth and a lie.
- ▶ As Christians then we are responsible for learning how to discern! To fail to discern is sinful. To close our eyes and refuse to inform our consciences so that we might sin and get away with it is no excuse. For us, sin is a matter of life and death! And to willingly neglect the truth and to live with our eyes closed shut while good and evil stare us in the face is to sin against God, ourselves, our families, and our church.
- ▶ It is the responsibility of every Christian to learn, to be disciplined in the Word, so that we can know how to be discerning. To fail to discern is to walk in darkness.

Got Milk?

- ▶ Hebrews 5:11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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.
- ▶ Speaking of learning to discern, were you aware that babies need milk? It's true. Babies of every sort find nourishment for their growing bodies by drinking milk. God has designed mothers to produce milk for their babies. And no one ever found fault with a baby who needed and wanted milk as if that were some sort of an aberration.

Got Milk?

- ▶ Spiritually speaking we know that milk is used by writers in the Bible to refer to the simplest and most basic elements of the Christian life. Just as newborns need milk so too new believers need to be fed the milk of the Word – the simple, basic, foundational truths from God’s Word that will nourish their souls.
- ▶ However, what is strange is the notion that a person who is grown would refuse to eat solid food and would instead only seek to drink milk. As we grow we learn to eat solid food. We outgrow the milk stage and while we as a grown up may enjoy milk (especially with Oreos) we know that milk is not enough to sustain us. We need solid food if we are to be nourished.
- ▶ So think with me a minute about what the writer of Hebrews has written here. He has stated that there are those who are dull of hearing, they refuse to learn to discern, and as a result of this sinful behavior we are told that they have not grown, they have not been nourished by eating meat, but by some deformity and some irregularity they have come to need milk instead of solid food.

Got Milk?

- ▶ These people should by now know enough to be teaching the Word to each other (making disciples – Matt 28:19-20) and assisting each other in their spiritual growth and development. However, they are not teachers and instead are needing to be taught. And the real tragedy here is not that they need to be taught – for indeed we all need to be taught continually. The trouble is that they need to be taught the “first principles of the oracles of God”, that is, the foundational basic truths found in the Word of God.
- ▶ These people, through the hardness of their hearts and the dullness of their hearing have forgotten the most basic things about God and His Word. They have come to need milk. It is not that they have failed to grow into eating solid food. No. They have fallen back into needing milk. They have lost ground! They have returned to an infantile state.

Got Milk?

- ▶ Now, we are to be childlike in our faith, but we are never to be childish. And here we see that one of the results of failing to discern is that we lose ground, we backslide. We miss the differences between right and wrong and slide back to the point that we actually need to have the simplest doctrines reiterated to us so that we might walk in the truth.
- ▶ We cannot miss the point that milk is important. Babies NEED milk. Without it they will not be nourished, they will not grow, and they cannot live! However, what we have here are people who have outgrown this stage and yet have now fallen back into it. They cannot grow. They are stunted and harmed in their lives because they have dulled their hearing. They have, in the words of our text, become unskilled when it comes to the Word of God.

Got Milk?

- ▶ As we grow out of our spiritual infancy and into “adulthood” we not only move beyond needing milk to needing solid food, but we also learn how to handle the Word of God. We learn to read, interpret, apply, and obey the Word. The goal for us all is that we be workers who need not be ashamed because we are able to rightly handle the Word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15). But if we slide back into infancy and immaturity then we will fail in our attempts to handle the Word of God. We will be unskilled.
- ▶ How can we be unskilled in the Word and lead our families? How can we be unskilled in the Word and worship as we ought? How can we be unskilled and be pleasing to God? We can't. If we fail to discern, harden our hearts, and backslide then we will fail in the Christian life and our duty to God and one another.

Got Milk?

- ▶ We are God's children in that He has adopted us and made up part of His family. But we are not to find ourselves in a constant and unending state of infancy. Babies are cute. Grown men wearing diapers and drinking from a babies bottle are not cute – its unnatural. As we apply the text in our study we must remember that there is nothing cute, admirable, or worthwhile to be found in a group of people who dull their hearing, fail to discern, and therefore cannot help but backslide and act like big babies.
- ▶ We are to desire the meat of the Word. And just as every child wants to grow up we too must strive to grow in grace and mature in our walk with the Lord. Milk is good and necessary for nourishing babes. But we should be past that already.
- ▶ Are you growing in your walk with the Lord? If not, what is holding you back? Are you only drinking milk? You know the phrase – Got milk? Well, if all you've got is milk then perhaps it is time you learned to ask, "*Where's the beef?*"

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ Hebrews 5:14 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.
- ▶ In learning to discern we have seen that we must work at gaining understanding. We must do our part in learning the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and sound and unsound doctrine. Interestingly at their roots the words good and evil allude to health. The word good means to be clean or healthy. It is that which promotes life. Evil on the other hand is literally “that which causes harm.” Evil hurts us. It destroys life and well being. So as we learn to discern we see that it is more than just striving to know the difference between right and wrong. It is a matter of life and death, living the abundant life of a Spirit filled believer or dying as a result of the wages of our sin coming due!

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ In order to discern we must move beyond the milk stage of our Christian life. We must be maturing. We must be nourished from the Word of God and taught the truth so that we are able to understand and obey God's will. And we see that solid food belongs not to the babies, but to those who are of full age. They are growing up. They are maturing. They are experienced. They are older.
- ▶ These who eat solid food are not novices. They are not newborns. And we must remember, this is not a comparison. It is not that the older are better than the younger. For the young need milk. And the old need solid food. This is age-appropriate spiritual appetites. There is nothing at all wrong with a baby drinking milk or a grown up eating solid food. What is out of place is trying to force feed meat to babies or insisting that grown ups only drink milk. We must learn how to nourish one another with the Word.

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ So what is it that makes us grown up? In real life it is a matter of time. It is age. Days, months, years, decades. We are infants, grow to be children, young men and women, and then adults. However, it is not a matter of time when it comes to our spiritual life. We know this as it is plainly evidenced in the Bible that many young people were used mightily of God to accomplish His purposes. Spiritual growth and maturity is not a matter of time, it is a matter of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
- ▶ Knowledge refers to facts. And any person young or old can regurgitate facts, but when we add to facts wisdom, that is, the right perspective, then we see that we can learn facts in a way that they influence who we are and how we think, talk, and behave. Understanding comes into the mix as we must know how to have a right perspective as we ponder the facts and make decisions. Understanding is having the ability to use both the perspective and facts we have and arrive at good, sound decisions. Simply stated, to understand is to discern.

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ The words used here are that those who eat solid food are those “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” They use their senses. They have exercised their senses so that they might discern good and evil. They by reason of use have come to understand the difference between good and evil, between that which promotes life and health and that which destroys life and health. (As a side note, how often do we think of sin in terms of that which harms us? Kind of takes the glamour out of that temptation, doesn't it?)
- ▶ In speaking of our senses though we need to be very clear. Those who are maturing are using their senses for the purpose of discerning. That is why our senses are bombarded daily with things that would distract us from this important mission! Think about it. Let us talk about our senses and the battle that is fought so that we might pay attention to good or evil.

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ We sense through sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. It is the experiencing of the world around us. There is a physical reality here as well as an emotional and spiritual reality. We are spiritual beings living in a fleshly body, all one whole being that is created in the image of God. And we learn the difference between good and evil experientially.
- ▶ But what dominates our senses these days? We suffer from sensory overload. A simple illustration is found in the world of television. Each year producers of TV shows push the limits more and more trying to gain and keep an audience and win more market share of viewers. More sex. More violence. More language. More shock! Why the downward spiral? Because once they gain an audience it takes more and more to keep that audience!

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ Think in terms of food. If you eat at a restaurant and the food is awful and the service deplorable, will you go back? No! I hope not! We go back to that which pleases us. And the more it pleases us the more eager we are to return.
- ▶ Another example is found at the amusement park where each year the rides get more and more outrageous. Why? Because we demand more of a thrill, more of a ride, more of an experience!
- ▶ Sin is like that! The more pleasure we can find the more we want. But in the face of the sensory overload, we live amidst, we must learn to discern!! To meditate on the Word, to be still and know He is God, to wait on the Lord. In these times of microwaves that are not fast enough and drive through fast food that takes too long, we must not ever put aside spiritual disciplines for the sake of selfish fulfillment. We must lay up treasures in heaven, having an eternal perspective instead of a temporal perspective.

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ The truth is, it is easy to feed the flesh and overload our senses. It is easy to drown out the Spirit of God with the methods, music, and messages of the world. It is all too easy to drown in a pool of pleasure unaware of the danger that surrounds and engulfs us.
- ▶ But those here, those who discern, those who know the difference between good and evil, they are those who exercise their senses in that very pursuit – to know the difference between good and evil so that they may do the good and shun the evil. As Paul wrote to Timothy, he encouraged him to do two things – to flee and to pursue.
- ▶ What was Timothy to flee? He was to flee from envy, strife, arguments, selfishness, greed, hatred, wrath, discontentment, and all the other works of the flesh that the Scriptures warn us about. He was to run away from youthful lusts and selfish ambitions. He was to shun those who cause division in the Body of Christ. He was to fight for the truth against those who lie!

Exercising Our Senses

- ▶ But it was not enough for Timothy to flee these things. Just as importantly, he was told by Paul to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” He was to yearn for the fruit of the Spirit in his life. To chase after being right with God and loving Him with all he was! And that is our example – to flee what is evil and to run after what is good.
- ▶ But how do we know which is which? Here is the practical application of learning to discern. We learn as we go. We learn from others and from our experience. Mostly we learn from the Word of God. We must know the Word if we are to know God’s standards of right and wrong. And as we learn from the Word and are disciplined in the Christian life, we must keep in mind that when we find evil, we should shun it – not play with it! And when we find good, we should embrace it and hold firmly to it.

Practice Makes Perfect

- ▶ How are you exercising your senses today? Are you filling your senses with the works and wants of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Or are you exercising your senses toward godliness? Deep down you know the answer. I pray that you are learning to discern and fighting to do what is right for all the right reasons.

- ▶ Next week: Lesson 15 – The Devil or Depravity – James 1:14-15