



Spiritual maturity! What does it mean to be spiritually mature? Today, we are all going to be challenged, whether your new to Christ or been walking with the Lord for years. We will all be challenged.

### **Heb. 5:11-14**

*Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. 12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. 13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised **to discern** both good and evil.*

Contrast to the mature, are the spiritually immature, those who are still in need of milk. The apostle gives a gentle rebuke to us who still use milk, telling us, there are many things he would have liked to say to us, but it's difficult to explain the weightier things of the spirit to us because we are *dull of hearing*.

The term “*dull of hearing*” is – (*νωθρός, ἄ, ὄν νόθρος (no-thros')* sluggish, listless or lackadaisical) and (*ἀκοή, ἤς, ἡ ἀκοέ (aw-caw-ay')*), which refers to inner or spiritual hearing that goes with receiving faith from God; i.e., discerning God's voice.

As we know, “*faith cometh by hearing*”, and such hearing has nothing to do with just reading my Bible, just listening to preaching or teaching. *ἀκοή, ἤς, ἡ ἀκοέ (aw-caw-ay')* “hearing” is introspectively receiving, whether by hearing it preached, reading it for myself, or by direct revelation, it is receiving the Word or message of God into my being with understanding. Hearing is not mere intellectualizing something to be true, it's hearing truth that alters my perception. For example, it wasn't until you heard (*ἀκοή, ἤς, ἡ ἀκοέ (aw-caw-ay')*) the Gospel that you accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. You may have heard the Gospel before then, but you didn't “hear” (*ἀκοή, ἤς, ἡ ἀκοέ (aw-caw-ay')*), where it entered your heart and you professed with your mouth and received a new birth of spirit.

In **verse 12**, the apostle reproofs us for our non-progressive growth in spiritual matters because of our dull, listless, lackadaisical hearing in our spirit...He tells us,

*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of*

*God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

This does not mean we are all to be public teachers, preachers, evangelist or some other public figure proclaiming the Gospel. Not at all. The phrase “*when for the time*” signifies a considerable period; which tells us, considering the time which has elapsed since we came to Christ, it’s been long enough for us to have grasped the doctrines of Christianity, and we should be able to explain these basic truths and principles. As parents we ought to be able to explain them to our children; as neighbors, to our neighbors; as friends to our friends. However, he says, many of us still need to learn the basics or first principles of the oracles of God; i.e., salvation by grace, remission of sin, water baptism, baptism of the Holy Spirit, being born of Spirit, laying on of hands, and even Jesus being God manifested, which are the elementary teachings referred to in **Hebrews 6:1-2**.

This reproof should challenge us all to strive to attain spiritual maturity. So, let’s begin with what it means for the mature Christian “*by reason of use having exercised their senses to discern good from evil.*”

We see that meat belongs to the spiritually mature, by reason of use (*which is the word ἕξις, εως, ἡ hexis (hex'-is): meaning by practice and constant use*), having **exercised** their senses to **discern** both good and evil.

Last week we learned the equation for transformation to righteousness,  $RM + B \times DH = TtR$ . We learned that we are to present, make our bodies, available to the Lord for Him to

exercise it to transforming us unto righteousness. So, we see that spiritually mature comes by constant use and practice. The word *exercise* or *γυμνάζω* *gumnazó* (*goom-nad'-zo*); not only means to physically exercise; don't miss this, but it also means to exercise naked. Now naked simply means to be exposed, to be bare of any covering, plainly revealed. Immediately, two passages should come to mind;

### **John 3:20-21**

*Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

And,

### **Heb. 4:12-13:**

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

What we see about the mature is that they live their lives bare, exposed, knowing each and every thing they do, the good, the bad and the ugly is exposed, openly and plainly seen by God, to which they give an account. They hide nothing. Practice and exercise is for the purpose of correcting mistakes and development of strength, skills and ability. The mature live in constant practicing

and exercising their skills, developing their strength and ability in full exposure, knowingly being plainly seen of God.

Many of us, though we believe God sees all, as did David, still deceive ourselves, of the truth, as did David when he committed adultery and then caused the death of Uriah, that may be, just may be, God didn't notice it. Come on now! We still call things what their not, not to call them what they are before God. There's no need to get into any particulars, we each know what those are. Tell the truth before God! Don't wait for Nathan to come tell you!

So, we see that coming to spiritual maturity requires nakedness, complete exposure, to be bare, uncovered before God! To be completely naked, and we're not talking about physical nakedness, but mental, emotional, psychologically and spiritually is a fear for most people. People have a fear of baring their souls, even before the Almighty! But, to grow towards spiritual maturity, you must come to a place where you can practice, exercise naked before God. Amen!

Still with me?

The next thing we see, is mature Christians are able **to discern** *both good and evil*

What does that mean, “*to discern*” or “*discernment*” *both good and evil*”?

First, let's define what it means *to discern* or *discernment*:

There are two Hebrew Words for *to discern* or *discernment*:

**בין bin (bene)**; which means, to perceive with senses, give heed to, consider with attention;

And,

**(שמע shama (shaw-mah')**: to hear observantly or intelligently), **shama** is also the Hebrew word for “understanding”.

Let’s look at an example of these two words for discern in the story of Solomon asking God for both **בין bin (bean)**; and, **(שמע shama (shaw-may-ah')**, that he may judge God’s people, and discern between good and bad. God was very pleased with Solomon’s request – **1 Kings 3:5-12**.

**1 Kings 3:11-12**, *God said to Solomon, Because... thou hast asked for thyself understanding (שמע shama (shaw-may-ah': to observantly hear); to discern (בין bin (bean); to perceive with senses) judgement. 12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise (חכם chakam (khaw-kawm'); skillfull) and an understanding (בין bin (bene) heart.*

**(חכם chakam (haw-kawm')** skillful, is having or exercising a skill. A skill is the ability, coming from one's knowledge and practice.

Solomon asked God to give him the skill, the ability, which he could exercise his senses to make judgments between “good” **טוב towb (toe-va)**; which means what is pleasant, agreeable, good – to the senses, whether to the sight, to the taste, to the hearing, of the time, place, or person, from what is **רע ra' (rah)**; bad or evil;

which means anything that seems unethical, displeasing, bad, unclean, malignant, disagreeable, divisive, wrong, immoral, etc., of person or persons, motives, intents, deeds and actions.

Solomon would hone his skills to discern “*good and evil*”; not good, benevolent good, but what is right, better, best as opposed to bad/evil, not boogie man bad, ostensible evils, such as, killing, stealing, lying, adultery, blaspheme, cursing, etc., such things require no discernment, there obvious, but to discern wrong use, wrong motives, wrong intentions, unclean, disagreeable, divisive, problematic, and so on, which is not always obvious.

Let’s look at the wonderful story of Solomon exercising his God given skill of discernment in judging between two harlots or prostitutes, and one dead baby and one live baby. Let me say this, most of us would have first judged the women as being bad mothers because they were harlots or prostitutes, which would have clouded our judgement. However, Solomon exercising his skill of discernment, judged not the apparent bad or evil of their being prostitutes or harlots, he discerned the apparent need for good; i.e., the need of a mother and a child, without pre-judge what was apparent. Stick a pin in this!

With the use of common sense, yes common sense, Solomon discerned, that a mother’s love would not allow harm to come to her child, even if it meant she had to give up her child. Solomon used God given (**שמע** *shama (shaw-may-ah')*: observantly, intelligently hear) to discern (**בין** *bin (bean)*); perceive with his senses) to make a just judgement. It doesn’t tell us, that Solomon heard some word from God, or he prayed on it and God told him what to do. No, he applied himself to exercising and listening to

the God given common sense he already possessed to render a judgment.

Now, let's look at the NT, the Greek Word, *to discern* or *discernment*: **διακρίνω *diakrinó* (dee-ah-kree'-no)**; which means, to distinguish; decide, to pass judgment; but it also means to distinguishing between "look-a likes," i.e., things that appear to be the same. Stick a pin in look alike – we'll come back to it.

### **Matt. 16:1-3:**

*The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. (Jesus says to them), When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. 3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

He calls them hypocrites. Why? Because they used their senses to discern/judge the worldly, outward, physical or material matters, but don't use their senses to discern spiritual matters. They asked Jesus for a sign from heaven, but they had already witnessed, saw and were aware of the many signs and wonders Jesus had performed. They could have "discerned" any one of His miracles to know He was from God. Their failure *to discern* was not for lack of evidence or their capacity to judge such evidence; nay, they choose not to apply their senses to make a judgement. How many of us fail to judge what is apparent to our senses?

For instance, many Christians today take Jesus Words, "*judge not lest you be judge*", to mean they are not to judge someone's actions, behaviors, motive or intent, and some time not even their

own. You hear many Christians say, “O’ I don’t judge anyone” because the Bible says, *judge not lest you be judge*. What about, “*you can tell a tree by the fruit it bears*” - If it grows apples, it’s an apple tree. If it has peaches on it, it’s a peach tree. If you steal, you’re a thief. If you lie, you’re a liar, if you commit adultery, you’re an adulterer or adulteress, etc., and so on. The use of basic discernment, we are to judge persons, matters and circumstances in truth. However, we are not to judge – prejudge or be judgmental towards anyone, because you don’t know what’s in a person or what God may be doing in their life.

Let’s take the pin out of Solomon judging between the two harlots or prostitutes, and the one dead baby and the live baby. It was not Solomon’s place nor could he determine whether God would offer forgiveness, grace and mercy to either or both of these women. It is not for us to judge. You can speak to their acts, which didn’t require discernment, they were harlots, prostitutes, they bore the fruit, but you cannot judge what only God can judge. The Lord tells us in **Rom. 14:4** *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.* And, who knew better than Paul, who once persecuted believers, and many of them were once afraid of him.

That’s what Jesus meant when He said, “*judge not lest ye be judge*” – “pre-judging”, being judgmental, judging from the wrong motive, when you know not their situation or circumstance. Just talking about folk!

These two passages “*you can tell a tree by the fruit it bears*” and “*judge not lest you be judged*” are not paradoxical nor contradict

one another, it is simple discernment we are to exercise, righteous judgement.

We are also told, **1 Cor. 6:3**: “*Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*” Now, how much sense does it make if God would have us judge angels, but we are not to judge the obvious actions, matters and circumstances of men? If you steal, you’re a thief, but by the grace of God, Jesus can redeem you from being a thief. This is the exercising our sense to discern spiritual matters. **Think about it!**

I hope your still with me.

The reason most of us don’t truly exercise discernment is because we are confused and confounded. Confused and confounded by listening to ourselves, the world and the devil.

For example, how many Christians believe that drug and alcohol addiction is a disease? Listening to the world and failing to exercise common senses and reality. A disease is something caught or contracted by accident, caused by infection of bacteria or virus, is infectious, that attacks our health. A disease is can be contracted by a person, an animal, a bug or plant. But, animals, bugs or plants don’t willfully go purchase to acquire an infectious disease. Drugs and alcohol is something you go acquire, purchase; so, how can that be a disease?

I am not saying, we should not to be understanding or sympathetic towards those who have addictions, because we all can easily be caught to an addiction at anytime. And we need to do all we can

to help those who are addicted to drugs, alcohol or any other addiction. However, common sense dictates that drug and alcohol abuse is no disease, but an addiction that one is accountable for in choice. It is these types of confusion from the world and the devil that impedes our exercising our senses of discernment, and our hearing remains dull.

The enemy of our souls doesn't want us to exercise our God given discernment, but to listen to him and the world. This why we need to renew our minds. The enemy knows that when we renew our mind and exercising our discernment we will become more and more familiar with his plots, plans, schemes, traps and tricks. **2 Cor. 2:11** tells us, "*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices*". He wants us to be listless, lackadaisical and listen to the world. He doesn't want us to see beyond the smoke and mirrors.

Now, let's pull that pin out of the word *diakrino* (*dee-ah-kree'-no*)'s, meaning to discern look a likes. Let's look at an example of this from the Word, **Acts 8:13-24**:

*Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy*

*Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. 24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*

In reading this passage, it's easy for you to be dismissive of Simon and simply say to yourself, "o' he wasn't really a believer." But, that's the part of you being judgmental, which we have not right or claim to do. Scripture does tell us, "*Simon himself believed and was baptized.*" Simon even sought to be mentored by Philip, a spiritual man, remember Philip is the one who was told by the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel with the Ethiopian. Should Philip have known that Simon wasn't a true believer?

See, we have the benefit of knowing the outcome of the story, which doesn't take any discernment on our part. What we are to glean from this, is Peter's discernment. It says, *when Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles hands, he offered them money.*

Now, the word "offered" is ***προσφέρω prospheō (pros-pherō)***; which is the same word used for our giving tithes offering, love offerings, ministry offerings, missionary offerings, etc., which

many of us do when we perceive the work of the Lord is being performed.

Again, we know the conclusion of the story, which doesn't require discernment on our part whether Simon was offering a bribe to Peter and John. But, how many of us discern if our giving, other's giving is out of the wrong motives, to the wrong ministry or for the wrong cause? Ex: Hold up service.

That was not of God!

Now, here's the thing, (vs. 23) tells us, Peter "*perceived*" *ὁράω horaó (ha-rah'-o)*; which means to see with the inward man or spiritual perception. It was Peter's exercising discernment that he recognized the motives of Simon rather than his action. Did you get that? He discerned the motive behind Simon's act of offering. Just judging purely from the outward appearance, Simon's offering was not evil or bad, as a matter of fact; today, we would give applause and heap praises upon that brother, for his wanting to give a love offering or gift offering, missionary offering to the church or pastor. Let's be real. Simon, did nothing more than what is commonly done by church members throughout the world today, make an offering to the ministry.

Peter discerned between look alike! That's the point of this testimony the Lord wanted us to see – "*spiritual perception and discernment*" exercised by Peter. Peter perceived within his inward man, Simon's motives. Peter's use of discernment made him aware of Simon's motives and intent.

So, what we understand is that, “to discern” or “discernment”, has to do with being able to distinguish or judge one from another based upon our exercising of our senses.

A zircon is a diamond, a man made diamond, and looks like a real naturally made diamond. Unless you have been trained or developed the skill to spot a zircon from a natural diamond, you won't know the difference.

The goal of the believer is to grow to full maturity, with the constant use and exercising of discernment. The simplest definition for discernment is the ability to decide between truth and error, between right and wrong; being able to make distinctions between shades of gray, the primary from the secondary, what is essential from what is trivial, the good, the better, and the best.

Here are three Principles to Develop our Spiritual Discernment.

Principle one:

Never trust your heart alone.

**Jeremiah 17:9-10** says, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*" This is the first enemy of discernment, trusting your own heart. Why? Because we are all fully capable of deceiving ourselves. The apostle Paul re-enforced this principle in **I Corinthians 4:3-4** when he says, "*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of*

*you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. 4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord."*

How, many of us are willing to humble ourselves, not to trust ourselves, and allow the Lord tell us about ourselves? Get real...but you can come to it! As Paul says, he doesn't trust relying on his discerning and judging his own motives, actions, and attitudes at times. His only confidence was in the Lord!

Principle two:

Drink milk and exercise.

Verse 14 says, "Solid food is for the mature, *who **because of practice** have their senses exercised."* So, apply common sense, if solid food is for the mature, what food did they use to become mature? Milk. You become mature by first having milk.

The problem is not the milk that babes don't develop into eating meat. The problem is with babes not exercising with the milk they have. As you can see, the key terms in **Heb. 5:14** to becoming mature is "practice" and "exercise". Drink milk and exercise by asking God to take you through some things for your faith to grow. Move from practice to experience. Develop muscle faith, like muscle memory. Undergo, endure, preserve by presenting yourself to be tried and tested relying on the solid teachings of the Word.

It doesn't take discernment to know what's wrong if you have a list, knowing not to murder, steal, commit adultery, etc., doesn't require exercising of discernment of your senses of "good" and

“evil”. Discernment requires going beyond the rudiments of the obvious, you have to be willing to go through some spiritual things.

Principle three:

Watch what you mix in your milk.

God’s word contains all the spiritual nutrients needed for spiritual growth. Don’t mix or dilute God’s Word with worldly wisdom.

There are so many Christians today who seek wisdom and counsel outside of God’s Word; Vanzant, fix my life, Opra said, the therapist said, Google said, people on social media said, etc., and so on. This is not to say that all counseling and advice from the world is bad, evil or wrong. To the contrary, we are to learn from our senses of the things of the world and matters, but I am not to disconnect it from the vine, but exercise my spiritual senses within the vine, comparing it to the Word of God. I am not to simply accept wild advice or counseling that is disconnected from the vine, where it remains worldly, devilish, **James 3:15:** “*This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish*”. I am to exercise my spiritual discernment of whether it’s good or bad, whether parts are good and other parts not useful, having compared it to the Word of God.

Advise or counsel outside of God’s Word, may seem wise, may sound good, even look good from the outside, but it’s always wild, when not connected to the vine, if it’s not founded and grounded in and on the Word of God. But, many of us are listless, lackadaisical and are easily willing to accept something because it’s given to us, it’s readily available right here, right now and

seek no further, because we don't want to put in the effort to seek because we want a reason now. Let's look at an example of this in the Word of God.

## **2 Kings 4:38-41** Death in the Pot

*Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these prophets." 39 One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine and picked as many of its gourds as his garment could hold. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. 40 The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it. 41 Elisha said, "Get some flour." He put it into the pot and said, "Serve it to the people to eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.*

In many situations, Christians mix their milk with wild gourds and wonder why they feel sick.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, a vine is used to symbolize God's people and Himself as the vinedresser. So, this symbolism of it being a "wild vine" shouldn't be lost on us.

Elisha's servant looked around and because he couldn't apparently find what he was looking for he went to a "wild vine" growing wild gourds. Elisha's servant simply did not seek to hard, and went to what was apparent before him. Maybe had looked around a little more, he would have found something on the vine that was not only safe, healthy but delicious. How, do we know

this? Because, it tells us (vs. 39) *though no one knew what they were*. He didn't even know what they were. Common sense should have dictated, you don't know whether it's safe to eat, taste good or foul. It's one thing to taste for yourself, but to feed it to many others? Come on now!

Yet, he opted for what seemed apparent, the gourds on the "wild vine" that turned out to be "death in the pot".

If you don't want death in your pot, sometimes you have to be diligent, patient, persistent in your exercising of discernment until that which is for you God brings to you. Don't readily accept what's apparent mixing it with your milk.

There is much more we can cover regarding the issue of growing spiritually, but I hope you have gained a better understanding and been challenged to grow. In Jesus name Amen!