

Discernment
as a
Decision Making Tool

Discernment in Scripture

Can sinful man hear the voice of God?

Genesis 3:6-8

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may be one's learning how to decide between options

Hebrews 5:14 – 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.*

Malachi 3:18 – Then shall ye return, and *discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

Ezekiel 44:23 – And they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and profane, and *cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may be one's learning how to decide between options

1 Kings 3:9 -11– Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, **that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?...** And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; **but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment...** Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart....

2 Samuel 19:35 – I *am* this day fourscore years old: *and* **can I discern between good and evil?** can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? (Note: a warning against losing the ability to discern.)

Job 6:30 – Is there iniquity in my tongue? **cannot my taste discern perverse things?** (Note: **metaphor for ability to decide between options.**)

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may be one's learning how to properly apply knowledge

Luke 12:56 – *Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? (cf. Mat. 16:3)*

Jonah 4:11 – And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

Job 4:16 – It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image *was* before mine eyes, *there was* silence....

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may at times be different than the gift of the Discerning of Spirits, but does not necessarily have to be

1 John 4:1-6

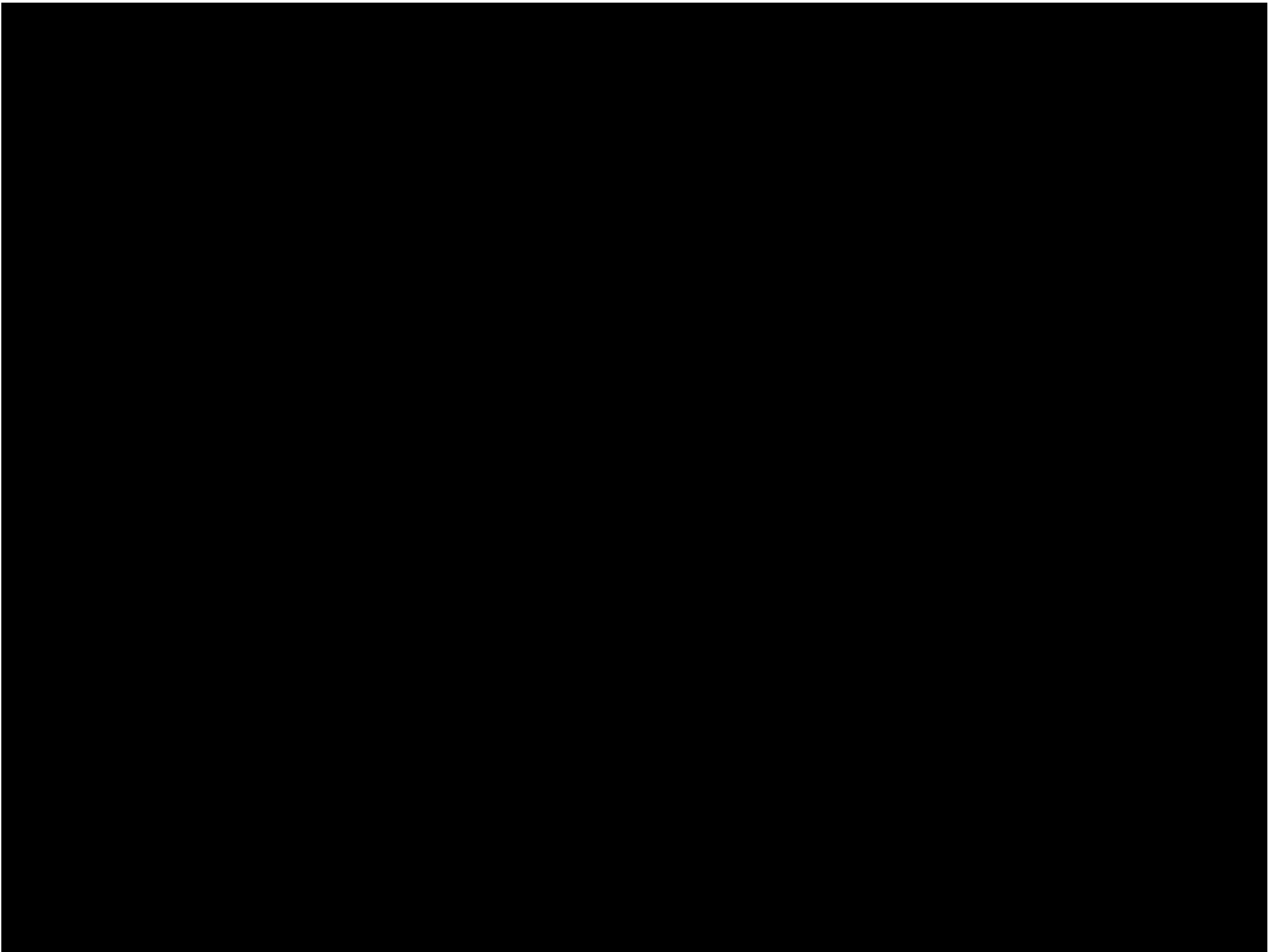
¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may at times be different than the gift of the Discerning of Spirits, but does not necessarily have to be

1 John 4:1-6

⁴You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.



Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may at times be different than the gift of the Discerning of Spirits, but does not necessarily have to be

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

12 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ² You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may at times be different than the gift of the Discerning of Spirits, but does not necessarily have to be

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

⁴There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, **to another discerning of spirits**, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may at times be different than the gift of the Discerning of Spirits, but does not necessarily have to be

John 14:26-27

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**. ²⁷ **Peace** I leave with you, My **peace** I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The Holy Spirit is...

John 16:5-15

⁵ “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, **the Helper** will not come to you; but if I depart, I will **send** Him to you. ⁸ And when He has come, He will **convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment**: ⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The Holy Spirit is...

John 16:5-15

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. 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**. ¹⁴ **He will glorify Me**, for **He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you**. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.^[c]

The Holy Spirit is...

Romans 8:1-17

¹*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do **not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** ² For the **law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ **For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.** ⁶ **For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.** ⁷ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (continued)

The Holy Spirit is...

Romans 8:1-17

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Holy Spirit is...

Romans 8:1-17

¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

¹³ For **if you live according to the flesh you will die**; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ **The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

**The Spirit Himself
bears witness with our
spirit that we are
children of God**

**These are sons of God
... as many as are led by the
Spirit of God**

If we are the children of God...
We ARE led by the Holy Spirit

Discernment Experiences in Scripture

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may allow one to see beyond physical appearances

Acts 8:23

¹⁴ Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may allow one to see beyond physical appearances

Acts 8:23

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ **For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.**”
²⁴ Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.”

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may operate as a confirmation

Acts 15:28-29

²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may operate as a Yes or No

Consider the Urim and Thummim as referenced in Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Deuteronomy 33:8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65.

These were two stones that were carried in the Israelite priestly clothing originally worn by Aaron, Israel's first High Priest, and used as an oracular device to consult God in whatever matter was presented to Him by the priest (Bookman, 2001; Houtman, 1990). The word Urim signifies 'light' and the word Thummim signifies 'integrity'.

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may operate as a Yes or No

Urim and Thummim (continued)

Matthew Henry quite poetically illustrates the use of the Urim and Thummim as explained in Exodus 28:30 when he pens, “And thou shalt give, or add, or deliver, to the breast-plate of judgment, the illuminations and perfections, and they shall be upon the heart of Aaron; that is, ‘He shall be endued with a power of knowing and making known the mind of God in all difficult doubtful cases, relating either to the civil or ecclesiastical state of the nation.’”

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may operate as a Yes or No

Acts 16:3-10

³ Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. (continued)

Discernment in Scripture

Discernment may operate as a Yes or No

Acts 16:3-10

⁶ Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit^[a] did not permit them. ⁸ So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

These verses signify that an individual or individuals were pursuing a given path, but that through some mechanism they perceived God intervening and bringing an understanding or illumination of an alternate decision or direction.

Some disciples of Jesus consider the Charismatic gift of the Word of Knowledge—a supernatural sense of God speaking to an individual—an experience of discernment (Ekblad, 2011).

Cognitive Aspects to Discernment

I have identified 13 stages of discernment as defined by my research. These 13 are cognitive stages. However, parallel and overlaying all these stages are the spiritual aspects of:

- prayer,
- Scripture reading,
- quiet reflection,
- Solitude; and
- fasting.

The spiritual aspects happen in and through all 13 stages at the discretion of the discerner. The following slide lists the 13 stages in order of action. Those cognitive stages that happen selectively are bracketed and may be interpreted as 'perceived optional.' Those without brackets happened in all instances.

1. The stimulus stage where the discernment process is triggered.
2. The self-searching stage where one evaluates internal issues to eliminate self-initiation.
3. The emotional stage where the stimulus incites responses [which may incite a return to stage two].
4. [The source identification stage where one attempts to decipher how the external phenomenological stimulus originated.]
5. The cognitive stage where one attempts to assimilate meaning.
6. [The data-gathering stage where observations and research are pursued.]
7. [The counsel-seeking stage where others are invited into the discernment experience for their observations. [Recursion may happen at this stage as discernment is used to gain discernment from others.].]
8. The conclusion stage where final meaning is assigned to the experience.
9. The decision stage where one decides how or whether to act on the conclusions.
10. [The action stage where a plan or decision is carried out.]
11. [The self-doubt stage as one strives to maintain clarity after action occurs.]
12. [A recursive stage, which may call this cycle from any of the preceding points to develop deeper clarity. And then,]
13. [A backward looking stage where the process is observed through the lens of hindsight and deconstruction to form deeper clarity and add the finished memory to a personal compendium of experiences for use with future discernment events.]

Stepping Into Discernment

Try on possibilities like a coat...step into each one and examine it from inside. Use your spiritual sense of peace as a test. Without executing the decision, make the willful decision to do it; walk into every decision to see how you feel about each one. By doing this we give the Holy Spirit something to work with, something to agree or disagree with (Rom 8:16). Make the decision TO DO something and check your spirit for peace or the lack of it; make the decision NOT TO DO something and check your spirit for peace or the lack of it. Colossians 3:15 tells us to let our hearts be ruled by peace.

