

# Learn to Discern

LESSON 1 – FAILING TO DISCERN  
ROMANS 1:28-32  
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# Failing to Discern

- ▶ Romans 1:28-32
- ▶ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, **undiscerning**, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

# Failing to Discern

- ▶ These verses show us what happens when people refuse to acknowledge God. In truth, each and every person is born with a knowledge of God and His Law in their hearts and minds. However, it is within our fallen human nature to work very hard at repressing that knowledge. You see, to admit the truth, that there is a Holy, Almighty God means that we as His creation are accountable to Him. And fallen, fallible man hates nothing more than accountability to a Perfect, Infallible, Higher Being. We crave the fulfillment of our own lust and pride, living to sin. And we will do literally whatever it takes to get away with it!

# Failing to Discern

- ▶ When we do this, if not for the intervention of God and His grace by the power of the Spirit, we will chase sin until it consumes us. We will believe the lie that sin is satisfying and we will learn the hard way that committing sin is like drinking salt water. The more you drink the thirstier you get until you die from dehydration! Sin leads to sin which leads to sin. It never finally or completely satisfies and it will eventually kill us.

# Failing to Discern

- ▶ If we reject the gospel and the truth that we are born with, we reject that knowledge of God and refuse to retain the truth in our hearts and minds then God will give us over to a debased mind. In other words, when we consistently and constantly abandon God in our thoughts He will abandon us to our sin. He will turn us over to be consumed by our impurity.
- ▶ That truly is a frightening thought. But it happens all around us every day. Sinners who fight for all they are worth to deny the existence of God. And God turns them over to that vain, futile thinking. When this happens there is evidence. Jesus tells us we will know men by their fruit. A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit or no fruit at all.

# Undiscerning

- ▶ In studying this terrible passage we must take note of a particular sin that makes the list. Often we think of sin in degrees – some being worse than others. And when we think of categories of sin we usually think along the lines of those things which are impure, immoral, or idolatrous. We admit immediately and willingly that murder, sexual immorality, and disobedience is sin. But how often do we think that it is a sin to be undiscerning?
- ▶ And yet there it is in verse 31. Those who are turned over to their own devices and debased minds are undiscerning. That means that we can classify a lack of discernment as sin! Did you get that? We often wrongly think that discernment is a gift and we either have it or don't. But the Scripture lists a lack of discernment as a sin, as a mark of living in depravity.

# Discernment

- ▶ So what does it mean to discern? 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.

# Hebrews 5:11-14

- ▶ Hebrews 5:5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.” 6 As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” 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.



# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ As we learn about Jesus and His priesthood, as He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, we find that there is much to be told to us about this wonderful High Priest. The writer speaks of Jesus saying that there is much to say, some of which is indeed hard to explain. Likewise, John closed his gospel by writing, “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”
- ▶ The point being, we serve a wonderful, at times unexplainable, great and mighty God! His ways are above our ways and His thoughts are above our thoughts. It truly is a matter of grace that we can comprehend anything about Him at all, there is just so much to know. But as the writer of Hebrews makes his case he mentions one drawback, one obstacle, one roadblock that prevents the reader from knowing all that they can know about Jesus. What is it? *It is a lack of discernment!*

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ There is so much to learn about Jesus and yet we are “dull of hearing.” The term can be translated “sluggish” or “slow” and it refers to a dulling or muffling of sound. It is as if we can hear sound but not quite make out what the sound is or where it is coming from.
- ▶ Over and over we read in the Scriptures that in order to know what God is doing we need ears to hear and eyes to see. We are born deaf and blind. We cannot hear or see or comprehend what God is all about or is doing. In fact, we are born spiritually dead in our sin. And that is why it is said of God’s amazing grace that “I once was blind, but now I see.” He opens our eyes. He unstops our ears. Then we can hear and understand, and obey.

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ But the text shows us that there is a problem when we try to explain the truth about Who Jesus is to people. They may be dull of hearing. Their ears are stopped up. The truth cannot be heard. They cannot discern the truth or urgency of what we are telling them as we preach the gospel and present to them the Lord Jesus.
- ▶ The same thing happens as we are discipled and strive to grow in grace. At times we miss an opportunity to grow and participate in a daily walk of victory with Christ because our ears get all stopped up and we fail to discern right from wrong, good from bad, sound doctrine from unsound. So what causes us to become dull of hearing?

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ The first cause of dullness of hearing is God. Yes, you read that correctly. God hardens hearts, stops ears, and closes eyes. At times in order to accomplish His purposes for His own glory according to His own good pleasure He will move deliberately to harden us to His Word and His will. As the Potter who has authority and freedom over the clay He has every right to do with us as He pleases and we cannot blame Him for doing what He does for His own glory.
- ▶ An example of this is seen in Isaiah 6:9-10. As Isaiah has seen the Lord lifted up in the Temple and he overhears the Lord having a discussion with Himself. God asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Isaiah’s response, after having been cleansed with a coal from off the altar (signifying the sacrifice of Christ to forgive our sin) replies immediately, “Here am I, send me!”

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ When he does express his desire to be used of God to preach His Word God tells him something rather shocking. God says to Isaiah: “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.”
- ▶ As Isaiah is ready to preach the truth that will be used to bring the dead to life and the lost to salvation God replies that his ministry will involve preaching to people who will not and cannot understand what he is saying! They will hear but not understand. They will see but not recognize what they are seeing. God says He will make their heart dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes shut. And He will do this in order that they will not be able to hear the gospel and repent!

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ That sounds harsh, doesn't it? But what a warning for us. Just as Nahum's prophecy to Nineveh and Obadiah's to Edom, there comes a time when a people run so far into sin against God that He cuts off all ways and hopes of escape from judgment. At this point, when God turns people over to their sin, He does not tell them to repent, for they will not repent. No, it is too late for that. He hardens them, giving them over to their lust, and allowing their sin to destroy them. God hardens their hearts and dulls their hearing.
- ▶ Another example for us of course is Pharaoh. God told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh, and when Pharaoh refused to let the people go God sent the plagues and did miracles and proved for all the world to see that He alone was God. He glorified Himself in Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to do what He commanded.

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ But notice here too that we see another cause behind the hard heart and the dull ears! Just as God can harden and dull, we also see that a second cause of dull hearing is that we can dull our own hearing and blind our own eyes. In Exodus 7:3-5, 13 God hardens Pharaoh. But we also learn in Exodus 8:15, 32 that Pharaoh hardened his own heart! He knew the truth but willfully refused to yield to God's Word.
- ▶ Pharaoh shows us that while God may actively harden us we can also harden ourselves! We can make ourselves dull of hearing. When we do we have actually failed to discern! We miss the truth. We miss what is right. We overlook and fail to see what God wants of us. We dull our own hearing when we decide not to listen.

# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ Failure to discern happens all too often. We find truth inconvenient and would rather indulge our flesh and our own will for a time and so we reject the truth of God's Word and do what we want. We make of ourselves our own god and we do what we want to do. We make excuses. We blame our flesh or we blame others. We actively and willfully decide to sin by refusing to discern and do what is right no matter the cost.
- ▶ Here in Hebrews 5 there is so much that the writer wants to tell the reader about Jesus but they have dulled their hearing and would not understand. How frightening. To think that we can fail to discern and as a result miss precious truth about Jesus!! This is exactly why failing to discern is a sin. We hear the truth and do not listen. We harden our hearts. We tune God's truth out and we close our eyes and stop up our ears. All as a sacrifice on the altar of self-service so that we can do what we want to do, even while knowing it is wrong. We chose to refuse to discern. And we compound sin upon sin.



# Dull of Hearing

- ▶ What have we missed from the Word of God, from our pastor as he preaches, from the songs with which we worship God, from other believers as they teach and testify? What riches have we cheated ourselves out of when it comes to knowing more of Jesus all because we fail to discern and dull our hearing? The thought should grieve us – that we would go to such lengths to excuse our sin that we turn a deaf ear to our Lord.
- ▶ Discernment is the first line of defense against sin and dishonoring Christ. Don't disengage your heart, soul, or mind today – instead work, pray, and strive to purposefully approach the day with an attitude of willing discernment – looking for the good and embracing it all the while rejecting and shunning the evil and harmful and unhealthy things that will surely confront us.
- ▶ Do not fail to discern! Make your mind up right now. Do what is right, not by chance, but by design. Do what is right because you refuse to do what is wrong.

# Next Lesson

- ▶ Lesson 2 – Got Milk? – Hebrews 5:12-13