

**SPECIAL INTERLUDE ON HANDLING SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT UNREST**  
**"A Crib Sheet On Handling Spiritual Discernment Unrest"**  
**(Selected Passages From 1 John)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

There is a **recurring** experience in the lives of believers I've witnessed over the years, and in recent weeks it has happened several times. The event creates turmoil in the heart, something pastors should address, so I am using a Special Interlude sermon to do just that.

The event *generally* crops up like this:

- (a) Christian "A" reads in his Bible or hears a sermon by a reputable preacher on an issue and agrees that a certain practice or belief is very wrong (or right, as the case may be).
- (b) However, later he sees Christian "B" whom many view as "godly" promoting that very practice or belief, and so Christian "A" asks him for an explanation in view of Scripture.
- (c) The alleged "godly" Christian "B" says to Christian "A", "Well, that is **your** interpretation, but I don't see it that way because **famous** Christian Author 'C' has another view in his recent book which I adopt!" and goes on in the practice or belief without addressing Christian "A"'s interpretive concerns to his satisfaction.
- (d) Christian "A" comes away confused, for his supposed "errant interpretation" hasn't been sufficiently countered by Christian "B", and in view of **famous** Christian Author "C"'s book, he begins to wonder if somehow he **himself** has **misunderstood** the *Bible*!
- (e) When Christian "A" asks **other believers** he knows about the interpretation, mentioning Christian "B"'s response to him, they retort, "Well, Christian 'B' is so mature, and he backs it up with Christian Author 'C"'s position, so the problem's *got* to be **you**!"
- (f) Christian "A" is left restless, so he buys Christian Author "C"'s book and reads it, getting more confused and troubled!
- (g) By the time Christian "A" sees Pastor Shell, he is so upset over not understanding **why** he feels something is fishy that he can't sleep well anymore. When Pastor Shell shares **his** view on the matter, Christian "A" doesn't know whether or not to believe **him** as by **then** he doubts *everybody*!

**Accordingly, we need to address the problem of spiritual "mind games" and the RESTLESSNESS within that we experience over differences of viewpoint or interpretation among Christians.**

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

***Need: 'I've got a 'mind game' problem: a party others say is 'godly' holds to a view or practice that I instinctively RESIST and I in turn am called 'weak' for my REACTION! I can't stop being RESTLESS over this! WHY, and how can I be at peace again over the issue?!'***

- I. **We can use 1 John as a primer to conquer spiritual "mind games":**
  - A. 1 John was written to counter Gnosticism that *misled* people by **exalting** as *correct* the **NONLITERAL** interpretation of the Bible, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, p. 1770; Zond. Pict. Ency./Bible, v. 2, p. 736.
  - B. Thus, **one** role of 1 John is to **equip** God's people to *define* spiritual *realities* to **avoid** misleading spiritual *mind games*, 1 Jn. 1:8; 2:26; 3:7.
- II. **We list the *discerning truths* in 1 John that counter "mind games":**
  - A. Factor One - The most **immature** Christian can **trust** the indwelling Holy Spirit to equip **him** to **discern ALL spiritual truth from error!**
    1. 1 Jn. 2:18-27 was written for **immature** Christians, for John refers there to "babies" using *paidia*, John G. Mitchell, Fellowship, p. 70.
    2. John tells these immature believers that the indwelling Holy Spirit equips them *subjectively* to **sense ALL** truth from error, 2:20, 27.
  - B. Factor Two - Thus, by using Scripture, the Holy Spirit equips the most **immature** believer to discern **true** from **false** Christians (as follows):
    1. 1 John 4:1-3 tells him that those who deny Christ's incarnation are not believers where those who confess it are of God.
    2. 1 John 3:8-9 tells him those who *customarily sin* are *unsaved* where those who *habitually live righteously* are *saved*:
      - a. The KJV word "does" is from *poieo*, "to practice", Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T., p. 688.
      - b. The focus is on "habitual" actions, Ibid., Mitchell, p. 95.
      - c. Though a true Christian *occasionally sins* (1 John 1:8-10), he does not live a *life* of it as do the unsaved, 1 Jn. 3:8-9; 5:16.
  - C. Factor Three - Thus, by using Scripture, the Holy Spirit equips the most **immature** believer to *discern* those who truly **obey** God from those who live in *counterfeit* obedience to Him as follows:

1. John's phrases of "walking in darkness" and "walking in light" in 1 Jn. 1:6-7 reflect the teachings of Isaiah 8:19-9:2 (as follows):
    - a. As a Jew who knew His Old Testament, John identified Jesus to be the Isaiah 9:1-2 "light" that had shown in spiritually dark Galilee where he had once "walked in darkness" as a fisherman.
    - b. The "darkness" in Isa. 9:2 (and thus of Isa. 8:19) is countered by the "light" of God's Word in Isa. 8:20 and of Christ in Isa. 9:2 so that "light" is the truth of Scripture and Christ, and "darkness" is extrabiblical error promoted even at times by demons, Isa. 8:19!
  2. Thus, "walking in darkness" to John meant ordering one's life by extrabiblical ideas and "walking in the light" meant living in accord with God's revealed truths through Christ and the Scriptures!
  3. Uniting this insight with the "**Factor One**" conclusion above, the most **immature** believer can discern if one obeys or disobeys Scripture as follows: *if he RESPONDS to the Spirit's subjective signal of UNREST on an issue to STUDY Scripture to see WHO obeys God, he ASSUREDLY discerns those who obey God and thus fellowship with Him, and those who don't*, 1 John 1:5-7!
- D. **Factor Four** - Thus, by using Scripture, the Holy Spirit equips the most **immature** believer to discern **truly loving** Christians from those with an **artificial** love by heeding the following truths (as follows):
1. 1 John 2:5; 5:3 tell him that if a believer obeys Scripture, he thereby **loves** where *disobedience* indicates an **artificial** Christian love!
  2. 1 John 3:15-18 tells him that if a believer **fails** to provide **help** when he has the **resources** to meet a fellow believer's **need**, he does not fellowship with God, and displays thereby a form of **hatred**.
- E. **Factor Five** - Thus, by using Scripture, the Holy Spirit equips the most **immature** believer to discern **enlightened** people from the **blinded**:
1. 1 John 2:11 states if a believer hates or disobeys Scripture, he lives in darkness, and the darkness obstructs his spiritual discernment!
  2. Thus, even **immature** believers can discern truly "godly" people by their love and obedience to God, and detect those with a **false THOUGH ALLEGED** "godliness" with their lack of love and obedience to God who are actually **blind** to their error and **need**!

***Lesson Application:*** *If we are RESTLESS over a spiritual issue that plays "mind games" on us, see (1) IF we have received Christ by faith to be indwelt by the discerning Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 1:13-14). (2) Then check the 1 John verses above to see IF we are right with God. (a) If NOT, ((a)) confess our sin that caused our OWN "blindness" (1 Jn. 1:9) and ((b)) rely on God's Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23) to ((c)) heed Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:3-6. (b) Now, EVEN IF we may be IMMATURE Christians, IF we see from 1 John that WE OBEY God, and our view that OTHER alleged "godly" folk are errant is CONFIRMED by how WE interpret the Bible, then the alleged "godly" are BLIND, and our UNREST comes from the Holy Spirit Who is WARNING us to avoid their ERROR, Jer. 20:9!*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . . )

According to James Atkinson's work, The Great Light (p. 65-67), four hundred and seventy-seven years ago, an Augustinian monk was called before a Church-State assembly in Worms, Germany to answer to the charges of heresy. He had written many books criticizing the doctrine of the papacy and those who defended the papacy against his criticisms.

In the room where he stood facing the national and church leaders of Germany in his day, a table full of his critical books lay in the center. The monk was asked if he had written these works, and whether he would renounce them.

The man knew that what he had written was seen as heretical by the Church, and that normally meant death by burning at the stake! He knew he could not get out of the meeting as the entire nation of Germany was watching. Theologian prosecutor, Eck tried to put the Augustinian monk on the spot, asking, "Will you recant? Yes or No?"

The monk's response still rings down the centuries of time to this day. He said that unless he could be proved wrong on the basis of Scripture and sound reason (for popes and councils had been known to contradict and could err again), he was bound fast by his conscience to the Word of God. He could not and would not recant. The monk, Martin Luther closed his remarks by saying: "I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me, Amen!"

Thus, this Augustinian monk "stood firm and resisted both Emperor and Pope in the interests of truth. It was one of the world's greatest moments" wrote James Atkinson, Professor of Biblical History and Literature in the University of Sheffield (The Great Light, p. 67).

**The Great Reformer, Martin Luther, believed that HE could KNOW God's true Scriptural interpretation as revealed to him by the indwelling Holy Spirit and conscience, and that REGARDLESS of opposing opinions of the majority around him.**

Well, time has shown that Martin Luther was RIGHT!

**Accordingly, don't be swayed by majority opinion on what the Bible teaches, even if they come by alleged "godly" Christians. Like Luther, go with the view that Scripture and conscience under the Holy Spirit's teaching holds to be the truth!**