

# GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Returning to Our Roots

### STUDY TWO

## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

*The Bible gives us an inspired recipe for a balanced, healthy approach to life that requires a cup of discernment mixed in well with biblical knowledge.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As essential as knowledge is to our faith, a diet of knowledge alone is actually detrimental to our spiritual health. When knowing Bible doctrines becomes the only goal, when knowledge remains theoretical and impersonal without the commingling of love and grace, our spiritual arteries stiffen, and pride all-too-easily hardens our heart.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll recalls a time in his young adult years when pursuing Bible knowledge consumed him.

Thanks to the teaching of a very persuasive and powerful minister whose stated desire was to communicate the doctrines of the Bible, I became virtually brainwashed with his approach and system of thinking. And all who sat under his ministry for very long had the same mind-bending experience. A knowledge of doctrine became our watchword. Everyone outside our circle was judged on the basis of how much they knew. And since they never seemed to know as much as we did, we looked down our noses at them!<sup>1</sup>



## **Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

“Knowledge makes us feel important,” wrote Paul (1 Corinthians 8:1). Or, as the New King James Version bluntly puts it: “Knowledge puffs up” (8:1 NKJV). That’s it, isn’t it? Without love to bring us down to earth, we float above everyone else in our inflated ego. Knowing all the spiritual answers can make us feel superior, self-important, even snobbish.

How do we avoid this unhealthy condition? By adding a cup discernment to our mix of Bible knowledge.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Practically speaking, discernment is wisdom in shirtsleeves. It is the ability to put knowledge to work in a way that is wise, insightful, and useful. So rare and valuable is this skill that King Solomon famously asked God for it rather than asking for riches or fame:

*Lord my God, . . . give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. (1 Kings 3:7, 9)*

Literally, Solomon asked God for “a heart that listens.”<sup>2</sup> A heart that is open, receptive, sensitive, and teachable. Let’s follow Solomon’s lead as we explore biblical doctrine. In the space below, write your own prayer for discernment and humility.



**Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*



**TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Solomon set the standard (at least, early in his life) for the kind of godly wisdom that results when discernment accompanies knowledge. Biblical history highlights plenty of people who, like Solomon, balanced their knowledge with discernment. Others, however, did not.

In this study, we'll learn from their examples by contrasting two individuals and two churches, gleaning key principles that we can apply.



**Observation: Positive and Negative Examples of Discernment**

Charts are a helpful tool in *Searching the Scriptures* to contrast observations. In the following charts, write down what you observe about discernment's presence or absence.

**Diotrephes and Apollos**

Diotrephes was a leader in a church that John addressed in his epistle, 3 John. Diotrephes was puffed up with knowledge but lacked discernment. Apollos, on the other hand, displayed a wise balance. Write down the characteristics of both men in the chart below.

<b>Puffed-Up Diotrephes</b> <i>3 John 1:9–11</i>	<b>Balanced Apollos</b> <i>Acts 18:24–28</i>
Empty space for notes	Empty space for notes

**Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

What central difference between these two individuals stands out to you?

*There's something blinding that occurs when we lack discernment. I plead with you to remain gracious and tolerant. Perceive the logs in your own eye lest you become one who looks for specks in the eyes of others. Do not be blinded with your own importance. Diotrefes was a man like that. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

**The Corinthians and the Bereans**

The Corinthian believers had all the knowledge and gifts required for a body of believers to flourish spiritually. And yet, Paul admonished them for their petty arguments and shameful behaviors. They were rich in self-assurance but bankrupt in discernment. In contrast was the church at Berea, a city about 200 miles north of Corinth. The churches were not that far apart geographically, but they were worlds apart in spiritual maturity. Use the following chart to contrast the characteristics of these churches.

<b>Puffed-Up Corinthians</b> <i>1 Corinthians 1:4–12; 8:1–3, 9–12</i>	<b>Balanced Bereans</b> <i>Acts 17:10–12</i>

## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

What main difference emerges between these churches?

*It takes discernment to gauge one's actions. We don't simply become knowledgeable and then run wild with it, caring little about others. A person with discernment thinks about his or her lifestyle. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Principles on Discernment

The insights we gain from these examples help us craft principles. A theological principle is a biblical statement of truth that universally applies to all people. Principles transcend culture and time. If a principle was true in the first century, it's true today.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll based the following three principles on the passages above.

1. *No one person has all the truth.* Diotrephes claimed sole authority and rejected the apostles and other teachers. Balanced believers are wary of Diotrephes-type leaders and draw knowledge from a variety of trusted, biblically-sound sources.
2. *No church or ministry owns exclusive rights to your mind.* Our primary allegiance is to Christ alone, and we should be distrustful of cultic leaders or organizations that demand loyalty.
3. *No specific interpretation is correct just because a gifted teacher says so.* Just because a teacher is persuasive doesn't mean he or she is accurate biblically. We should all be Bereans, who studied the Scriptures to confirm what they had been taught.



## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

What other principles about discernment can you draw from the passages above? What warnings do the negative examples of Diotrephes and the Corinthians offer? Or what helpful guidelines do the positive examples of Apollos and the Bereans offer?



### Correlation: Complementing Passages

In *correlation*, we scan the Scriptures for other passages that shed light on the subject. Two really stand out for this study's topic. Read *1 John 4:1–3* and *Philippians 1:9–10*. Based on these verses, what do mature people with a balanced mix of knowledge and discernment do?

*Being balanced spiritually means being free from extremes, able to see the whole picture, and maintaining equilibrium. Balanced Christians are realistic. They are not afraid to say, "I don't know." They're tolerant, gracious, and have fun! They value other's opinions, even when they disagree. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment**

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*



### **Application: Life in Color**

Reflecting on the days when he focused on knowledge alone, Pastor Chuck Swindoll recalls how unidimensional and inflexible his life had become:

My world was reduced to a spectrum of blacks and whites and a very few grays. No color. No beauty. No cushion. No room for people who happened to disagree. Not much laughter and, most unfortunately . . . not much love.<sup>3</sup>

When Pastor Chuck recognized his lack of balance, he set out to study the grand truths of Scripture in a way that enriched, rather than stifled, his relationships with God and others.

As you take the next steps in your study of Bible doctrine, remember that *a healthy study of doctrine will grow your heart as well as your mind*. Paul distilled the essence of head-heart health this way:

*While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.* (1 Corinthians 8:1–2).

As you learn Bible doctrine, what can you do to grow love along with knowledge? Humility along with skill?



## Don't Forget to Add a Cup of Discernment

*Acts 17:11–12; 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 3 John 1:9–10*

Reflect on the principles of discernment from this study. Which ones do you sense the Holy Spirit drawing you toward? What can you do to keep your knowledge balanced with discernment?

With a prayerful attitude, a hopeful spirit, and a discerning eye, we take another step in our journey into the amazing world of knowing God and His plan for us and our world. Close your study with this final prayer.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, guard me from the pitfall of gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge. I long to know You for the bigger purpose of loving You more and experiencing a richer life filled with Your grace. Help me to stay balanced, to be realistic, compassionate, and teachable—more interested in loving others than winning debates. Give me a “heart that listens.” In Jesus’ name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life: Returning to Our Roots* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 35.
2. New American Standard Bible, 1 Kings 3:9, footnote. Accessed at biblegateway.com.
3. Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, 36.

