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# DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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## **Pastor Ken Silva: 1955-2014**

A remembrance by Sarah Leslie

**Pastor Ken Silva** of Apprising Ministries (<http://apprising.org>) passed away suddenly on Monday, Sept. 29<sup>th</sup>.



I was first introduced to Ken Silva during the early, heady days of the online ministries right after we set up the Herescope blog.

Early on Ken and I had extensive conversations about our research. Ken was a very studious researcher. He studied things carefully with integrity, and was a stickler for documentation. If he didn't get something right, he'd fix it immediately. He even pulled down a few posts. And he was an incredibly prolific writer. Not one of us could even begin to compete with his output! Sometimes he'd have put up 5 posts in a day and they'd all be good,

high quality, and insightful.

In recent years Pastor Ken began working closely with our own Discernment Research Group. He was an expert in the Emergent movement, Word-Faith, Mormonism, the false prosperity gospel, and the New Apostolic Reformation.

Ken and I invented new words together to make fun of the weird stuff going on in the evangelical church world. It was really a silly, quirky thing that we enjoyed, and it made us both laugh. We began to have fun with it, and pretty soon Pastor Larry DeBruyn joined in and began to share in the hilarity. We eventually ran a whole series on Herescope called "Neologisms for Evangelicals." Our favorite word of all time was "Evanschultzical" based on the character of Sergeant Schultz in the old TV series *Hogan's Heroes*. Schultz would say, "*I hear nothing, I see nothing, I know nothing!*" and that was how many evangelical leaders were responding to heresy.

Ken had a rich sense of humor. As the state of the church waxed worse and worse, the ability to laugh and make fun of some of the bizarre absurdities gave us all some comic relief. One day one of our Discernment researchers, Kim Treweek, came up with the name Nephy Lim, a character based on the nephilim endtime madness that was sweeping the prophecy circles in the church. Ken decided to do satires with Nephy Lim and they were wildly creative and very funny. At the time I had two teenage boys at home and they bought themselves a Bigfoot-looking gorilla costume and began to act out Nephy Lim episodes. They filmed it all in a campy 1960s-ish science fiction style. Ken loved it and put it up on his site! Sometimes we laughed so hard we cried!

Pastor Ken had been in declining health for a number of years, and in the past two years he suffered much. Nevertheless he continued to write as he was able. Ken was indeed a true warrior, fighting fearlessly for the faith. He was the most courageous and brave man I have ever known. He was tenacious, and he did not compromise. He had a shepherd's heart and he passionately longed for people to come to Jesus, to come to the truth. This was the burden of his heart right up to the very end.

Ken Silva was plucked off the wall, "well done, thou good and faithful servant." But is there a message in this for all of us? Isaiah 57:1 comes to mind. *"The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come."*

### **Choices Which Everyone Should Make in Life**

*By Johan Malan, Mossel Bay,  
South Africa (November 2014)*

**G**od created man as an intelligent being with a free will. In determining the course of his life, man does not act instinctively as he is not a robot that has been programmed to react in a predetermined way in any given situation. Intelligible facts are presented to him on what is right and wrong, thereby enabling him to discern between good and evil, and to decide for himself which beliefs and moral principles he wishes to observe in life. Although his choices are free and uncompelled, man is not free from the consequences of his decisions; and for that reason the Lord clearly indicates in His Word what is the final destination of different ways of living that people choose. The Lord wishes people to make informed choices, thereby ensuring that they will not regret their beliefs and actions one day when it will be too late to turn around and follow another course.

The most basic choice, which all people

make on the future course of their lives, is between the path of God's righteousness and the devil's path of sin. In the Garden of Eden the Lord gave Adam and Eve certain instructions on what they may and may not do. As they were right at the beginning of this journey, it was critically important for them to follow the Lord and not the devil. Forbidden things which are outside the will of God are called "sin," and if people do these things they turn away from the Lord onto the path of sin. We should clearly understand what this important choice is all about, as that determines the nature and final destiny of our lives.

However, the devil disguised himself and approached Eve with a story which was contrary to what God had commanded her. He tried to prove God's commands wrong, and cunningly persuaded Eve to experiment with sin. He said to her: *"You will not surely die but be like God"* (Gen. 3:4-5). That is exactly what Lucifer did before he was cast out of heaven and became "Satan" – the "Adversary" of God. He exalted himself in an effort to be like God, and in so doing despised and rejected the supremacy of God. His rebellious deeds gave rise to his fall, and subsequently he also tried to cause the first two human beings to fall into sin and thus becoming estranged from God. Satan succeeded with his apostate objective, as his victims did not properly consider the consequences of his evil counsel. The founding father and mother of humanity did not make an informed decision but rather acted naïvely and rashly, thereby making a fatal mistake of disobeying the instructions of the One who is the source of all truth and life.

Adam and Eve were unfaithful to God and heeded the advice of another god, the devil. Consequently, they did not only spiritually die but also physically became mortal people. These characteristics are inherited by their posterity, and because of that we refer to the inborn, sinful nature of the human race as the original sin. Paul says: *"Therefore, just as*

*through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).*

There is only one way to be saved from the spiritual death caused by the original sin, and that is to be forgiven and be regenerated by Jesus Christ, Who alone can impute the gift of eternal life. *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).* Through the first Adam we all died but through the last Adam, Jesus Christ, we receive eternal life (1 Cor. 15:45). However, every sinner must make a decision to receive Christ as Savior, as only then will he become a child of God who has received eternal life: *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John. 1:12).*

How was salvation granted under the Old Testament before the incarnation and atoning death of Christ? The Lord told Adam and Eve that they could indeed, spiritually speaking, have access to the tree of life. Through prayers and sacrifices they could approach the Lord’s throne of grace to be forgiven and saved by Him. However, the repetitive sacrifices could not wash away their sins, *“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).* The shadowy sacrifices under the old covenant had to be fulfilled by the once for all sacrifice of Christ who died as the Lamb of God on the cross. According to Hebrews 11:13, Old Testament believers died without receiving the promises of the Messiah, *“but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them [and] embraced them.”* Christ’s crucifixion retroactively atones for the sins of all believers since Adam.

All people of all times have to repent and turn to the Lord if they wish to be saved. This act coincides with the confession of the sinful state in which they were born, as well as the specific sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts them. A choice therefore has to be made *against*

sin and *for* the righteousness of God. The obligation to choose does not end after a person’s conversion – to the contrary, it continues for the rest of his life.

As long as you are living in a mortal body there is always the possibility of being tempted and seduced. The devil tries to rob and derail Christians by deceiving them to sin. As in the case of Eve, he approaches you in a disguised manner so you should not realize that you are dealing with him. In a cunning way he then convinces you to experiment with sin, as it may seemingly be beneficial to do so. If you have financial problems he will exploit this situation by showing you how you can make money in a dishonest way. He may even quote Scripture or examples from the Bible to justify sin, e.g.: “If King David coveted another woman, why shouldn’t you also do it? You are no better than him and we are all only human beings.” And also: “If King Solomon experimented with other religions and bowed down before foreign gods, what is wrong if you participate in multireligious activities such as Eastern meditation?”

The various ways in which people can be tempted to sin are endless. It is therefore important that we will be mindful of this possibility and take the necessary precautions not to yield to temptations and sin. Paul says: *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11).* James says: *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7).* Peter says: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).* Do not underestimate the spiritual battle by succumbing to the first temptation without offering any resistance. We should resist to bloodshed, striving against sin (Heb. 12:4).

All believers of all times have an obligation to resist sin. Cain did not contain his evil passions, but gave them free reign and thus developed evil characteristics and an evil disposition which induced him to sin. The Lord said to him: *"Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it"* (Gen. 4:6-7). Cain clearly made the wrong choices and he paid a very high price for doing so.

We are in exactly the same situation: Sin lies at the door and desires our collaboration, but we should resist it and rule over it. We should make explicit choices when confronted by sin: *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Eph. 5:11). Are you prevailing in the battle against sin and temptations, or is it a lost battle in your life?

In the New Testament it is clearly stated that the flesh, or old nature, offers a hide-out and basis for sin in your life, even after you have received the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Paul counsels believers in Ephesus that if they wished to prevail over sin they must put down the *old man* with his sinful inclinations and put on the *new man* which is created according to God (Eph. 4:22-24). When we make this surrender we give the Holy Spirit full control over our lives, and he will enable us to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh: *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"* (Gal. 5:16). The victorious life is offered to all of us but we also have to make a decision and embrace the promise of sanctification by faith before we will experience it as a practical reality.

Even Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit can still make wrong decisions which lead to sin. When they do so they do not walk by the Spirit but by the flesh. It is the great tragedy of our time that Christians do not seriously consider and pray over a matter, and

then often make impulsive decisions which are not in the best interest of the Lord's kingdom. God has given us enlightened eyes of the mind, which refers to biblical insight to discern right from wrong (Eph. 1:17-18). It is only in exceptional cases that He will directly intervene to give us clear-cut answers and open or close certain doors before us. He prefers that, through the Holy Spirit, we should remain so closely in touch with Him and His Word that we will be able to take the best possible choices in every situation.

The Holy Spirit is always there to guide our thoughts in the right direction when we have to make choices. If we make the correct decisions, which are in the interest of the Lord's kingdom, we will experience the peace of God in our hearts which will confirm that our contemplated action is in harmony with His will. If we do not have this peace of mind we should not proceed with our plans. However, certain Christians are obstinate and selfish in their relations with fellow Christians and often impose their own, subjective will on situations. In so doing so they act in the flesh, according to their own desires, and grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul warns against such mistakes: *"Give no place to the devil. ... And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God"* (Eph. 4:27, 30). Are you serving the cause of the Lord by the decisions you take?

This leads us to the subject of spiritual deception. In this area there are various important choices which children of the Lord have to take, as it closely affect their relationship with the Lord. The condoning of wrong doctrines on Jesus Christ, on the Trinity, on the Holy Spirit, and also on any other aspect of our spiritual life, may give rise to different degrees of backsliding and apostasy. In the same way in which the devil deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden to embrace erroneous ideas on the words of God, he still continues today to subvert, weaken and even destroy the faith of millions of Christians. Paul says:

*“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!” (2 Cor. 11:2-4).*

These Christians failed to search the Scriptures, to test all doctrines, and to only hold fast what is good. Due to their ignorance and naïveté they exposed themselves to false teachings about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit as well as the Gospel message. A deceptive and unscriptural image of Jesus was proclaimed – the Holy Spirit was only one-sidedly associated with certain signs and gifts, while in the presentation of the Gospel the concept of sin did not feature strongly, nor the need for sanctification. Paul often reminded this congregation that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that they should be committed to live holy lives (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

The Lord Jesus warned us that deception of this nature would strongly increase in the end-time, and that false presentations of Himself would be advanced with a view to preparing people to accept another Jesus, the Antichrist, instead of the true Jesus: *“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many”* (Matt. 24:4-5). Under the influence of deceiving spirits of the devil, a false gospel will be preached, attended by false signs and wonders: *“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.... For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Matt. 24:11, 24). False doctrines will lead to wrong decisions and convictions, and that will have disastrous consequences for the deceived.

Why are there so many divergent churches and confessions of faith in the world? Because Christians do not have adequate knowledge of the Bible and are easily tossed around and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). It is critically important that we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ so as to be able to make informed choices on the foundations and expressions of our faith. We should refrain from hastily accepting new teachings before they have been thoroughly verified in Scripture. Ignorance is the breeding-ground of deception. In Old Testament times, Israel went astray because of a lack of knowledge. Solomon said: *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov. 16:25). Thoroughly investigate all claims before accepting any of them, as not everything which seems to be good is necessarily true.

False prophets often exploit people’s desire for good news as an opportunity to deceive them. Deception of this nature was quite common in Israel, and the Lord said about these false prophets: *“They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace”* (Jer. 6:14). How can we avert wrong decisions and spiritual deception? By gaining more knowledge of the Word of God: *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free”* (John 8:32). The truth has a liberating power which sets us free from all lies, but then we have to do much more Bible study to be firmly rooted in the truth of God’s Word.

The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth and also convicts us of sin and other wrongs in our life. However, He does not talk to us in an audible voice but guides us through the Word. If we have a poor knowledge of the Word we limit the Holy Spirit in the degree to which He can bring certain Scriptures to our attention. The Psalmist says: *“Your word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You”* (Ps. 119:11). If the word of Christ dwells in our

hearts richly (Col. 3:16), the Holy Spirit will be able to fix our mind and thoughts more explicitly upon biblical truths.

Only under these circumstances will we be able to take every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. When a wrong thought occurs to us, or when a person suggests something evil to us, we can immediately reject it because the Lord warns us against it in His Word. But I have to take the final decision on any matter: will I resist the sinful thought or yield to the temptation to sin? If I accept a sinful thought without properly considering it, not realizing that it is wrong, then I will embark on the way which seems to be right and acceptable at first sight, but it may very well end up in a web of sin.

In our decision-making we should always resist sinful lusts as they will ruin our lives when given the opportunity to express themselves. James says: *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"* (Jas. 1:14-15). It is in this context that spiritual warfare is relevant to resisting and conquering sin: *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds [of sin], casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God [unbiblical arguments to justify sin], bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ [making a choice for the righteousness of God and against evil thoughts]"* (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

Since we know that human beings have a free will, we should surrender ourselves to the Lord and pray that His will be done in our lives, instead of our own selfish and carnal will. Paul said that he prays for the Colossians, *"and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully*

*pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col. 1:9-10). When we have a good grasp of God's will, it simplifies our task of decision-making. Through the Holy Spirit we will also have the inner conviction that we are still on the right track. The light of His divine presence will warn us against deviations from this way and the pursuing of hidden agendas.

When we go out to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to a lost world, we must keep in mind that the message should be conveyed in an intelligible and convincing manner. In this way, the Holy Spirit will be able to convict the hearers of their own sinfulness, and also of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. None of the recipients of the message are predestined for heaven or hell; consequently, each one of them is free to accept or reject the offer of salvation. The Lord loves the whole world and is *"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9).

However, in practice only a small minority of humanity is saved, since most people still prefer the sin and licentiousness of the broad way above the righteousness of the narrow way. During the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth the situation was no different: *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (John 3:19-20). Many people refuse to attend church or conduct religious discussions because they do not want to hear that their sinful lifestyle is wrong and that they are under the judgments of God.

We can't do anything about it if people reject the message of salvation since they all have a free will and can decide for themselves what they want. If we persevere in praying for them the Lord will continue to knock on the door of their heart, but they still have to decide

whether they will open the door from the inside, or not. Some people are very stubborn and unwilling to react to the Lord's voice calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Lord Jesus said to Jerusalem: *"How often I wanted to gather your children together... but you were not willing!"* (Matt. 23:37). They refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, in spite of the fact that they were members of the Chosen People. Their decision had nothing to do with election or rejection, but with the way in which every individual freely reacts to the message that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the world.

Joshua encountered the same situation of spiritual hardening in Israel, in spite of the fact that he was a respected leader who set a noble example of unwavering faith in the Holy One of Israel. He said to them: *"And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Josh. 24:15). Joshua could not keep them from following the wrong way – he could only warn them while he himself persevered on the right way of the Lord without deviating from it to the left or to the right.

This same offer of salvation to everyone who desires, is often repeated in the Bible and also appears in the final chapter of Revelation: *"And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22:17). Sinners will only become thirsty for eternal life if they can see in your life that it really works out. We should be a practical demonstration of the Lord's saving grace, so others can see without a shadow of doubt that the old things have passed away and everything has become new. What a privilege to be able to testify about the profound significance of Christ's salvation and His presence in your life.

If a person does not love the Savior of humanity then he rejects the new life which God offers to us. Such a person will be used by the devil as a stumbling-block in the lives of other people to keep them from accepting the true faith. Unbelievers of this nature are enemies of the cross: *"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed"* (1 Cor. 16:22). Do not follow such a person in his unbelief and agnosticism even though he may be morally a "good" person in terms of humanistic values. All people are confronted by the vital choice of accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ, who is the only Savior of humanity (Acts 4:12).

After being saved we should, as Christians, continue to make the right choices in accordance with the Word of the Lord, and daily walk in the Spirit. Guard against a spirit of doubt and despondency as that would grieve the Holy Spirit. Hold fast to the promises on the second coming of the Lord Jesus, fully realizing that the present earthly life with its tribulations, disappointments and struggle against evil forces will soon come to an end. We have the hope in Christ's second coming as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.

If we truly believe, we are anchored to Jesus Christ Himself. He is the rock upon which our lives are built. Everything that we do, we do by faith and in the strong conviction that His words which we proclaim will not return to Him void. They will work in the hearts and lives of those who receive them and guide them towards a positive decision to receive the new life which Christ offers to all who believe in Him. That is a critically important matter, and Paul asks the very relevant question: *"... how shall we escape [the judgments of God] if we neglect so great a salvation?"* (Heb. 2:3). If we fail to say "yes" to Jesus as Savior, we effectively reject Him and His saving grace. This important decision can therefore not be evaded.