

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

NIV - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, **10** to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, **to another distinguishing between spirits**, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

KJV - **to another discerning of spirits**

AMPLIFIED - **discernment of spirits** [the ability to distinguish sound, godly doctrine from the deceptive doctrine of man-made religions and cults]

Questions:

From the scripture above...

1. Does everyone have a manifestation of the Spirit?
2. Who gives these gifts?
3. Do you get to chose the gift?

● **WHAT IS DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS?**

-It is a gift of the Holy Spirit , a manifestation of the Spirit of God!

-It is a gift given to Christian believers for the common good.

-The word *discern* and its derivatives are translations of the Greek word *anakrino* in the New Testament. It means “to distinguish, to separate out by diligent search, to examine.”

-It is a Spirit-given ability to distinguish whether Divine, human or demonic origins are the source of what is presented—whether it be in an atmosphere, encounter, event, person or prophetic message.

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● EXAMPLES OF THIS GIFT IN ACTION IN THE BIBLE

Joshua

In Joshua 5:13-15

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord[e] have for his servant?” The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

Joshua recognised that the man who approached him was the angel of the Lord and fell on his face.

This happened right after the day the Lord had exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

** If Joshua had been blinded by pride or position he would have rebuked the man or fled but as a result of his proper discernment he received a clear word from the Lord and instructions for the coming great event...Jericho walls.

Nehemiah

Sanballat and Geshem learnt that the wall was complete.

They summoned Nehemiah for a meeting four times with the intention to take him away from the work and perhaps kill him. Nehemiah refused.

The fifth time they sent him a letter with accusations saying they would tell the king about his plan to revolt. Nehemiah still refused knowing that they were trying to instil fear on him.

Nehemiah 6: 10-13

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

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**If Nehemiah had responded in fear, he would have never finished the wall in record time and he would have probably been killed by his rivals. He applied discernment to recognise what peoples' real motives and intents were and who was for and against him.

David

In 2 Sam. 14:1-19, a wise woman was set up by Joab with a touching story to persuade David to have sympathy for his rebellious son Absalom. However, David discerned that she was speaking for Joab and she acknowledged that no one could get away with anything in front of him! It does seem that David's natural sympathy for his son Absalom began to cloud his discernment and eventually allowed an environment for Absalom's fatal rebellion.

**It can be very difficult to exercise clear discernment when family or deep natural sympathy is involved.

Peter

In Acts 8 We meet a man in Samaria named Simon also known as the great power of God because of his sorcery. However, when the people believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised and he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Peter and John came to Samaria to lay hands that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Simon wanted that gift...

Acts 8:20-23, Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

** Peter correctly discerned the motives of Simon the Sorcerer.

Paul

-in Acts 13:4-12, Paul meets a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet Bar-jesus (Elymas) who tried to keep the proconsul Sergius Paulus from the truth Paul was preaching.

Acts 13:9-12, Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the

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Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

****Paul accurately discerned the evil spirit, demonstrating the power of God which leads to the salvation of the proconsul**

-In Galatians 2:11-14 we see Paul oppose Peter (Cephas) in Antioch. Even though he was new, had just been in Jerusalem to seek confirmation from Peter and the highly esteemed, was the minority (apostle to the gentiles) and was surrounded by his peers, he did not succumb to the pressure to be "politically correct" when challenged by Peter's duplicity/hypocrisy.

-In Acts 16:16-18 we see Paul deliver a girl with the spirit by which she predicted the future: fortune telling. He could have easily thought that it was the Spirit of God because what she said was true...but he saw the evil spirit and its intentions. **She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.**

Ephesus

-In revelation 2:2, the church at Ephesus is applauded for practicing the gift. **I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.**

Thyatira

-In revelation 2:20, the church at Thyatira was slack in the practice of the gift. **You allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols**

Bereans

In Acts 17:11, the Bereans had a God-given ability to identify deceptive and erroneous doctrine. **Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**

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**No preacher or teacher of the gospel should resent having what he says judged against Scripture because no one is above reproach!

**False teaching can be judged by comparing it with Scripture, but false spirits can be judged only by the true Spirit's gift of discernment!!!

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● WHY IS DISCERNMENT IMPORTANT?

1. Ensures clarity in decision making and direction taking:

- As a church, we need to call on the Holy Spirit to lead and give direction on matters arising. During difficult times we need the Holy Spirit to help us make decisions and to lead us and guide us where God would want us to be. It is through this spirit of discernment that we the Church are able to know what God wants us to do and be.

“My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” Proverbs 21:24.

2. Enhances Godly Confidence:

Because we know God's Word, and we have His Spirit, we can have confidence in judging things. Having submitted ourselves to God's standard, we can then discern teachings, ourselves, and behaviours. Thus, we can have confidence in our beliefs and actions.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one." I Corinthians 2:12-15

3. Recognises the spirit behind a message:

-To discern/judge messages of interpretation of tongues, prophecies, teaching or preaching is truth and is from God.

-To confirm the source and accuracy of a message because sometimes true men of God can speak/react out of emotion, common sense/logic, knowledge of events, ideas from psychology, philosophy, or popular thinking that seem biblical but are not etc...just because it sounds good it doesn't mean it's God

-“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” Eph 6:12

4. Detects the actions and true intentions of those within or related to the body for the protection and well-being of the body.

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-This keeps the church safe from deception by discerning when evil spirits are present to disrupt the service and cause someone not to hear the gospel that will save the lost

2 Corinthians 11:14

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light

-Counterfeit teachers used by Satan usually have some truth in what they say.

Matthew 24:4-5,11, 23-28

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many...

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many...

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

1John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

-if it/he acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh AND IS THE SON OF GOD, then it/he is from God. If it/he doesn't acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and IS THE SON OF GOD, then it/he is not from God.

1 John 2: 22-23 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1John 4:2-3

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Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

1 John 4:15

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

1 John 5:1

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

-there is confusion because they have the title of a believer but are more popular with the world

1 John 5:2-3

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

2 John 8-11

"Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds."

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt 7:15).

Can you spot a wolf in sheep's clothing with no problem?

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5. Aids as a tool of ministry in deliverance, reconciliation, evangelism etc.

During deliverance, it is effective when you can discern what spirit you're casting out. Sometimes spirits will play around with you during deliverance and the job will sometimes be unfinished or take longer than it should.

Acts 16:16-18

16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." **18** She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

6. For daily living as a believer

- To know when it's the Lord speaking.
- To keep ourselves from being deceived in our places of work, businesses, relationships, etc.

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● **WHO HAS THIS GIFT/HOW TO IDENTIFY?**

Every Church is blessed with members who possess the gift of discernment. God uses those gifted as guardians; the watchmen who protect the church from demonic lies, false doctrines, perverted cults, and fleshly elements.

1. Desire for the Gift

You may have a longing to see people set free from demonic bondage.

You may want to be more effective in prayer and spiritual warfare

You may have a desire for holiness

You may simply be curious about the spiritual realm.

2. Love for God's Presence

You always make time and look for opportunities to be in the presence of God. There's nothing more that you could wish for than to be in His tangible presence. This makes you have a heightened awareness of God's Presence and anointing. A true discerner will have a passion for the un-grieved Presence of the Holy Spirit.

3. Sensitivity to the Spiritual Atmosphere

You may be more sensitive to spiritual atmospheres than most other people. In the early stages of developing the gift, you may be affected adversely by the presence of any demonic activity in the environment around you.

In the Bible, when Jacob came across a group of angels, he named that place Mahanaim, meaning 'double camp.' (Gen 32:1-2)

Like Jacob realised, we also live in a double camp where there is constant spiritual activity, and discerners have spiritual senses that are attuned to this. The reality is that we live in a natural world and a spiritual world concurrently.

4. Unusual Signs

It is not uncommon for someone who is gifted in discernment to experience unusual events or manifestations.

People who are incubating a discernment gift begin to see or feel things that others are not aware of. This may include unusual visions, dreams and sensations that alert them to what is happening in the spiritual realm. Smells, anger, lump in your throat etc.

For example:

Peters vision in Acts 10:9-23

5. Ability to Know What Lies Behind a Person's Words or Actions

You are able to sense the true motivation of persons and their movements, Someone with a gift of discernment has the ability to see behind what a person is saying and presenting. You may know whether they are telling the truth or not...you read between the lines.

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If a prophetic or revelatory message is brought, a discerner can often tell whether it is anointed of the Spirit or from the speaker's own heart.

- a) You can sense when a person is acting in accord with God's will. You can sense when a person is acting under God's leadership. You can recognise when a person is genuine/honest.
- b) You may also recognise if someone is manifesting a demonic spirit and be able to identify what that spirit is.

6. Feeling Different from Other People

Someone with an emerging gift of discernment of spirits can see and sense things that others do not see.

This ability can result in us feeling different, lonely or misunderstood at times, especially when starting out.

Unfortunately, many believers experience life through their natural senses and end up making discerners feel strange.

It is vital that someone with a developing gift of discernment finds a safe place to journey with others who are similarly gifted and accountable in the life of their church.

7. Do you have a great hunger for biblical knowledge and teachings? Do you have a passion for truth?

This is because you subconsciously need to have a knowledge of God and His word because you want to know Him more.

8. Does scripture flood your mind as events are unfolding??

When events are happening you seem to always connect with a scripture or a passage from the Bible.

9 Are you gifted with the ability to *uncovering wrong or evil*? Do you have the ability to *expose lies* and bring them into the light of sound reason and truth?

Those who possess the spiritual gift of discernment have the ability to see right through smokescreens and obstacles as they uncover the real truth.

10. Confirmation by Others and Leaders

You may have the gift confirmed through a prophecy given to you.

However, the bottom line of the presence of any gift is that it is recognised and acknowledged by leaders in the church and that it is useful for its purpose—which is to help build up the church and bring people closer to Jesus.

When you submit what you are seeing or sensing, your leaders confirm your accuracy and your gift begins to be recognised for its effectiveness.

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● HOW CAN YOU GROW AND EXERCISE YOUR GIFT?

-diligent study of the Word

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

-prepare and guard your heart

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Therefore, spend time in the presence of God, worship Him!

Develop a lifestyle of focused time in His presence!

Jeremiah tells us that **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**

We must therefore guard it!...be careful about the company you keep, what you watch, what you listen to...

-cooperate with the Holy Spirit

Obey what you hear the Spirit say even when it's illogical, not politically correct, against your culture etc.

Don't second guess yourself, it's okay to make a mistake.

-cleans myself from those things that endanger the clarity and purity of His gift in my life.

Don't allow sin to breed...when convicted, confess and repent!

-develop Godly Character

The fruit of the spirit shows the character of God while the gifts of the spirit show His power. Therefore, endeavour to allow the fruit of the spirit to be fully birthed in you. It takes godly character to effectively manifest the power of God!!

If this depiction of discernment describes you, thank God for entrusting you with this extraordinary gift.

There are many avenues to utilising this gift both in church and in the market place as a counsellor, an arbitrator/judge, a decision maker, a person in leadership, in the deliverance ministry etc.

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BEWARE!!

-When He shows us something—even if it is demonic in nature—it is because He has a purpose for us in revealing it.

God's heart is always to redeem and restore people and for His church to be purified and made holy

Eph 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

-Whatever you perceive in the spiritual realm, you do not want your impression or communication to be coloured by your own viewpoint, prejudices, fears, hurt, frustration or agenda.

This is a danger common to all who have the gift of discernment of spirits.

-You will sometimes get it wrong or have incomplete discernment

1 Thess 5:19-21 Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

1 Cor 13:9-10 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

-We must learn that outward appearances can be deceptive and only discernment guided by the Holy Spirit can preserve us from being deceived.

Let us learn to "inquire of the Lord," even if the outward facts appear obvious. In the situation with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9, discernment was sadly lacking, and the men of Israel were deceived. The Gibeonites wore old shoes, dusty clothes, carried cracked wineskins and moldy bread to convince the Israelite leaders that they had come from a far off country. **Joshua 9:14 tells us that, "the Israelite men sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord."** In other words, they ate up their story, but did not discern the Lord's mind. Consequently they were deceived and the results produced much frustration in the years to come.

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-abuse:

The gift of discernment, however, can easily deteriorate into a critical, proud, and self-righteous spirit. It can be judgmental instead of corrective when it is imitated in the flesh to criticise or tear down a church, person or leader,. But rightly used it is a great protection to God's people.

2 Tim 2:20-21

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself... he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.'

Finally

-Christians today are to be discerning as well. Paul prayed for believers "to discern what is best . . . until the day of Christ"

Philippians 1:10

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

-That is why discovering and using our gifts is important ; vital; crucial!