

Paul speaks of this gift in I Corinthians 12:7-11, as he wrote, **“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all; for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”**

Let me show you in the Scriptures the operation of this gift.

A. **JESUS SEE'S THEIR HEART - JOHN 8:30**

Jesus is going to press them for He saw their heart, exercising the gift of discernment. As much as they said they believed, their hearts were far from God. For as Jesus questioned them, they became defensive, said that Jesus was an illegitimate child, having a demon in Him, and picked up stones to kill him. This is an excellent example of Jesus exercising this gift, the discerning of spirits. He saw into the heart of the matter and he brought it to the surface!

B. **JESUS KNEW ALL MEN - JOHN 2:23-25, 6:64**

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus knew all men; He knew what was inside of them. Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him, and yet He kept extending His love to him. Many people today say they follow the Lord, are doing the work of the Lord, and yet they don't know Him. They are not one of His. The parable of the wheat and the tares speaks clearly on this. They look just like us and it won't be until the harvest time that the truth of the matter will be known, unless the Holy Spirit reveals that information regarding specific individuals. At times He does as you are talking with someone and they are speaking of the Lord and yet you know that they don't really know Jesus. There is something wrong and you can't figure out what, but God's Spirit is showing you!

C. **PETER SEE'S SIMON'S HEART - ACTS 8:9-23**

In Acts chapter 8 Philip goes down to Samaria and revival breaks out, people are getting saved. As you read Acts 8:9-17 the logical conclusion is that Simon is saved. He believed and was baptized. On the surface everything looked good. That was the problem. It was all on the surface. His heart was far from God. Now if I was down in Samaria and said that about Simon I would be called, “unloving”, “judgmental”, but listen to what transpired as Peter came down to Samaria.

Beginning in verse 18 of Acts chapter 8 we read, **“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”** Acts 8:18-23.

Peter comes in and exposes this false believer. He tells him that his heart is not right with God, that it is filled with bitterness and he is still bound in sin. The only way Peter could have known this is that the Holy Spirit revealed it to him; He showed Peter that something was not right in Simon's heart, even though Philip had seen nothing wrong and allowed him to be baptized.

D. **PAUL EXPOSES A FALSE PROPHET - ACTS 13:9-12**

In Acts chapter 13 we meet a person who is called Bar-Jesus, or the son of Jesus. The problem was that it was in name only. He was not a believer and as you read through these verses you can see that Paul discerned that this guy was not of God and Paul was not afraid to stand up and say so!

Now in saying that, we must also be careful that we don't allow jealousy, criticism, suspicion, or hate to be called discernment. Feelings are subjective and we need to be careful and make sure that what we are saying is from God, that our hearts are right and we are walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh. On the other hand, if the Holy Spirit has spoken to your heart, then you need to stand up for the truth, and speak it forth. The only way the church is going to remain pure is by using learned discernment and also this supernatural gift of discerning of spirits.

I believe that this gift as well as the learned discernment that God has given us is to be exercised in the church today. This gift of the discerning of spirits is needed even in the church today, to test the spirits, the teachings, to see if they are of God or if they are truly doctrines of demons! This gift is needed to make sure that what is spoken, what is taught, what people are doing is consistent, is in accordance to the Word of God!

Let us be wise and use the discernment that God has given to us and also the supernatural gift of discerning of spirits. It is truly needed in our lives and in the church today, the gift of the discerning of spirits!

What the Bible says about . . . Gifts of the Spirit Part 8

7. **GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS**

As Christians we need to be able to discern between the true and the counterfeit or we can get swept away with false teachings that are going on; the winds of false doctrine that come blowing through the church. As John admonishes us in I John 4:1, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** May we heed his words and test the teachings that are given to us to see whether or not they are of God.

Paul in I Corinthians chapter 12 places this spiritual gift, the discerning of spirits, right after the gift of prophecy, which was no accident. I truly believe the Holy Spirit inspired Paul as to the order of these gifts. Not that one is more important than the other, but when things are taught they need to be tested to see if they are of God. If they are not of God then toss them aside and hold onto only that which is good, only that which is from God, that which is found in His Word.

Some say that we are not to judge. They are wrong. They will go to Matthew 7:1-2, which says, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”** They will then say, “See, we are not to judge or you will be judged the same way you are judging others!” But when Paul spoke of the gift of “discerning of spirits” he uses the Greek word DIAKRISIS, dee-ak'-ree-sis, which means, “judging through.” The idea is to test if something is of God or not. So you have to judge it. Jesus, in Matthew chapter 7 was speaking of judging a persons heart, their motives. To test if anything is true or false, it must be judged, and not according to our own wisdom, but according to the Word of God.



In fact, as you read further down in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says we are to judge if something is of God or not. So again, in verses 1-2 of Matthew chapter 7 Jesus is speaking of not judging the motives, not judging a persons heart, not their actions. We are to judge what they are saying and not what they are teaching!

We also need to understand that this gift is not just using the knowledge that God has given to us to determine what is right and what is wrong, but it is the supernatural ability to, in a sense, see right to the heart of the matter. Donald Gee put it this way when he said this regarding this gift, "The essential thoughts of the word are a piercing of all that is merely outward, and seeing right through, then forming a judgment based on that insight. It is a sharp and powerful word."

Another writer put it like this, "Discerning of spirits is the supernatural ability given by the Holy Spirit to perceive the source of a spiritual manifestation and determine whether it is of God (Acts 10:30-35), of the devil (Acts 16:16-18), of man (Acts 8:18-23), or of the world. It is not mind reading, psychic phenomena, or the ability to criticize and find fault."

Still another writer wrote, "Discernment in Scripture is the skill that enables us to differentiate. It is the ability to see issues clearly. We desperately need to cultivate this spiritual skill that will enable us to know right from wrong. We must be prepared to distinguish light from darkness, truth from error, best from better, righteousness from unrighteousness, purity from defilement, and principles from pragmatics." (J. Stowell, Fan The Flame, p. 44).

In saying that, there is learned discernment and then the discerning of spirits. We will look at both of them to get a better understanding of them. I think it is important that we use the learned discernment as well as the discerning of spirits so we are not taken in by false teachers, false doctrine, the false prophets that are out there who look like the genuine, but are wolves in sheep's clothing!

DISCERNMENT

1. LEARNED DISCERNMENT

Now when we talk about learned discernment it really means just what it says. It is something that develops or grows over time. In Hebrews 5:12-14 Paul tells us, "**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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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.**" Paul, the writer of Hebrews is coming against those who have not matured in the Lord, those who have remained spiritual infants. They should have grown and learned how to discern between good and evil.

As a person grows in their relationship with God, taking the Word of God and applying it to their lives, they are exercising their faith, applying it to their lives.

In this section on learned discernment, something that each and every Christian should be exercising like a muscle, I would like to discuss three types of false teachers or false prophets.

Again, each one of us is responsible for recognizing them and not accepting that which is false, exposing that which is a lie and holding onto that which is true, that which is of God. The three areas that we are going to be examining are the ***DENIERS***, the ***DISTORTER'S***, and the ***DECEIVERS***. As you will see, some are very obvious while others are not. But the point being, none of them are speaking for God and they are to be exposed and not followed because of that! Some of these may even overlap, but as you will see, they are all dangerous!

A. THE DENIERS

The first group of people we are going to look at are the deniers! These people or teachers, are the easiest to spot. They flat out deny the faith. They reject Christ and they reject Christianity. As believers in Christ we should be able to see clearly they are not of God. Yet some Christians embrace them because they are not exercising discernment. They are truly immature in the faith.

Groups that are out-and-out deniers of the faith are Buddhist, Hindus, Muslims, the New Age, Eastern Mysticism and Mind-Science cults, the Occult such as Satanists and-so-on. These deniers of the faith should be very obvious to us.

B. THE DISTORTER'S

The second group of people that we are going to look at is the distorter's. These people or teachers are a little harder to spot and yet, when you bring what they say in the light of God's Word, it is not that difficult. This group teaches heresy that is many times coupled with the truth and they believe they are Christians. They may even use the same Christian jargon as we use and yet their definition of those phrases or words is completely different.

Groups that are distorter's of the faith are the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science, the Unification Church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Herbert W. Armstrong's World Wide Church of God (although it seems that the leaders are now retracting what Herbert W. Armstrong taught, and I guess time will tell if their words are genuine or not) and yes, even the Catholic Church. Of course there are others that also fit into this section. When you examine what the distorter's of the truth teach, they too can be recognized as false teachers.

C. THE DECEIVERS

The third group of people that we are going to look at is the deceivers. These people or teachers, these groups are probably the most difficult to spot. They are very subtle in the error that they teach, because they mix it in with a lot of truth.

They of course look like Christians, and some times they are, but other times they are nothing more than wolves in sheep clothing. When you listen to their teaching you hear about health, wealth and prosperity but never on denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus. They may refer to the cross but then never preach it.

They bring New Age and Eastern Mysticism into the church claiming that the early church fathers practiced these things. That may be true, but that doesn't make it right if what they practiced went against the Word of God. Please understand that learned discernment is not only to gain head knowledge, but to take those truths of God and apply them to our lives. Learning what is good and what is evil and holding on to the good and standing against that which is evil. The church today is lacking this. The words of Jesus spoken of in Luke 18:8 are an eerie call for us to stand up for what we believe in. Jesus said, "**... Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?**"

Make no mistake about it, the deception is only going to get worse and worse. Many will be taken in because they have not grown in the Lord, they have not Matured, and therefore they cannot discern good from evil! Learned discernment is an important part of our Christian life. May we not take it too lightly or ignore what God is saying to us!

2. THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

When we speak of the gift of the discerning of spirits we need to understand that this is different than learned discernment. The discerning of spirits is a supernatural ability to see right to the heart of the matter, to judge whether a teaching or a person is of God or not. It is a non-verbal revelation that the Holy Spirit gives to you, bearing witness with your spirit, that this person is not of God, the teaching is in error, their motives are wrong, there is pride or bitterness in their heart, or not to place them in a ministry at this time or not at all. It is not the word of knowledge, but just a feeling in your spirit that something is not right.