

Discerning Of Spirits

What is discernment? The word used in Psalm 119:66 means “taste.” It is the ability to make discriminating judgments, to distinguish between, and recognize the moral implications of, different situations and courses of action. It includes the ability to “weigh up” and assess the moral and spiritual status of individuals, groups, and even movements. Thus, while warning us against judgmentalism, Jesus urges us to be discerning and discriminating, lest we cast our pearls before pigs (Matt. 7:1, 6).

Psalm 119:66 (NIV)

*⁶⁶ Teach me knowledge and good judgment,
for I trust your commands.*

Matthew 7:1-6 (AMPC)

Do not judge and criticize and condemn others, so that you may not be judged and criticized and condemned yourselves.

² For just as you judge and criticize and condemn others, you will be judged and criticized and condemned, and in accordance with the measure you [use to] deal out to others, it will be dealt out again to you.

³ Why do you [a]stare from without at the [b]very small particle that is in your brother's eye but do not become aware of and consider the beam [c]of timber that is in your own eye?

⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, Let me get the tiny particle out of your eye, when there is the beam [d]of timber in your own eye?

⁵ You hypocrite, first get the beam of timber out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the tiny particle out of your brother's eye.

⁶ Do not give that which is holy (the sacred thing) to the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before hogs, lest they trample upon them with their feet and turn and tear you in pieces.

The Impact of Discernment

How does this discernment affect the way we live?

1. It acts as a means of protection, guarding us from being deceived spiritually. It protects us from being blown away by the winds of teaching that make central an element of the gospel that is peripheral or treat a particular application of Scripture as though it were Scripture's central message.

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

2. Discernment also acts as an instrument of healing, when exercised in grace. I have known a small number of people whose ability to diagnose the spiritual needs of others has been remarkable. Such people seem able to penetrate into the heart issues someone else faces better than the person can do. Of course, this is in some ways a dangerous gift with which God has entrusted them. But when exercised in love, discernment can be the surgical scalpel in spiritual surgery that makes healing possible.

3. Again, discernment functions as a key to Christian freedom. The zealous but undiscerning Christian becomes enslaved—to others, to his

own uneducated conscience, to an unbiblical pattern of life. Growth in discernment sets us free from such bondage, enabling us to distinguish practices that may be helpful in some circumstances from those that are mandated in all circumstances. But in another way, true discernment enables the free Christian to recognize that the exercise of freedom is not essential to the enjoyment of it.

4. Finally, discernment serves as a catalyst to spiritual development: “The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning” (Prov. 14:6, NIV). Why? Because the discerning Christian goes to the heart of the matter. He knows something about everything, namely that all things have their common fountain in God. Increase in knowledge, therefore, does not lead to increased frustration, but to a deeper recognition of the harmony of all God’s works and words.

How is such discernment to be obtained? We receive it as did Christ Himself—by the anointing of the Spirit, through our understanding of God’s Word, by our experience of God’s grace, and by the progressive unfolding to us of the true condition of our own hearts.

That is why we also should pray, “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.” (Ps. 119:125, NIV).

The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits

By Pastor Duke Taber

Today we are going to talk about what is commonly called the gift of discernment. The Bible calls it the gift of discerning of spirits.

There is a big difference between what many people think is the gift of discernment and what is the gift of discerning of spirits.

There have been a lot of people who have been taught that the gift of discernment is talking about discerning between right and wrong, sin and righteousness, and whether people are right with God or unsaved or backslidden.

This is not the gift of discerning of spirits but more than likely stems from a critical or judgmental spirit.

Rarely have I seen a person who claims to have the gift of discernment and to use it in this way come from a motive of love but instead they seem to have a hidden emotional need to look better than others.

The Real Definition Of The Gift Of Discernment

The gift of discernment is not about discerning the hearts of people but about recognizing the source of something.

When you are operating in the gift of discernment, you are recognizing where the driving force behind an action is coming from.

Many times, the actual motivational force behind people's actions and behavior are not apparent. This is where the gift of discernment comes in.

3 Categories Of Spirits Discerned By The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits

The Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is living in the inside of born-again believers in Jesus. This is recognized by the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit talked about in Galatians chapter 5. **The human spirit.** Man is a triune being created in the image of God. He has a body, soul, and spirit. The spirit of man usually can be recognized by a self-centered or egotistical point of reference. **Demonic spirits.** These are the fallen angels of whom; Satan is the leader. They are not all knowing, or all-powerful, or have other attributes only attributed to God, but they are powerful and dangerous. You can tell if you are dealing with a demonic spirit [by the fact](#) that they are always in opposition to the advancement of the kingdom of God. They will oppose the advance of the kingdom of God in the life of an individual or in the region of humanity they are in charge of.

Examples Of Discerning Of Spirits In The Bible

The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits In The Life Of Jesus

I personally love the Apostle Peter. He reminds me a lot of myself. At one moment he gets something right and is on the top of the world, and the next moment, he sticks his foot in his mouth and eats another bite of humble pie.

This is the case in the example I am going to show you about the gift of discernment in the life of Jesus.

In Matthew's gospel chapter 16, we have the incident where Peter has just had the revelation that Jesus is the son of God. He is flying high on the accolades of being the first one to understand this.

Then Jesus tells them that He is going to be put to death. Peter responds by saying "Lord this shall never happen to you!". Jesus responds by saying "Get behind me Satan!"

This is a prime example of the gift of discerning of spirits. Jesus rightly discerns the motivating force behind Peter's words.

Jesus was not calling Peter Satan but was addressing the spirit influencing Peter at the moment. That spirit was in opposition to the advancement of the rule and reign of Jesus over the earth thus it was a demonic spirit and in this case, Satan himself.

Another example of this gift in operation is at the last supper. Although it is not explicitly shown, you can gather from the context that it is in operation.

In Luke's gospel chapter 22, we see the story of the last supper. It says that Satan had entered the heart of Judas Iscariot. During the last supper, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him, and then subtly points him out. He then tells Judas to do what he must do.

It is evident to me that Jesus picked up on the change in Judas, and the plot ahead and discerned what Satan was up to. This again is the gift of discerning of spirits.

The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits In The Early Church

In the book of Acts chapter 8, we have the story of Simon, the sorcerer. He was a recent convert to Christianity and was amazed at the signs and wonders that were done in the name of Jesus.

When Peter and John arrived and started laying hands on the believers to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he offered them money so he could have this gift.

Now here is a prime example of how we need to discern the difference between what is coming from the human spirit and what is coming from a demonic spirit.

Peter and John did not call him Satan, or try to cast a demon out of him, but instead rebuked him and told him to repent. The motivation was coming from his

human spirit. It was out of a desire for fame and power. It was self-centered and egotistical.

Later in the book of Acts, we see the Apostle Paul do something that on the outside looks strange.

In Acts chapter 16 we have the report of a woman following Paul and Silas and Timothy around proclaiming that “These men are from the most high God and are telling the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days.

Now on the outside, this seems to be okay. She is telling the truth. However, Paul discerned that the motivation behind the woman’s words and actions is demonic. He casts a spirit out of her. The commotion she was causing was disruptive and counter-productive.

How many times have you seen someone who was spouting what sounded like the truth but had the fruit of chaos?

This is why it is essential to know the difference between the gift of discerning of spirits and what people call discernment. Many times those that are spouting truth but have no love are not motivated by the Spirit of God.

Understanding The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits In The Modern Church

Having this gift in operation in the local church is imperative.

We miss the boat so many times in how we deal with people. We try to cast devils out of people that have no devils but are giving in to the natural man with things like lust and greed and a desire for power.

We try to counsel people who are demonically influenced. We allow people in positions of leadership based on their knowledge of truth and unwittingly enable demonic influence into our church boards and pulpits alike.

Too many times I have seen both shepherds and church leaders on the local level operate in ungodly ways. Shepherds who herd the sheep like cattle, rather than lead the sheep like a servant. Boards who want control and be the defenders of the doctrine and protectors of the property.

It takes the discernment of spirits to understand what is going on and the proper method of dealing with these situations. Those motivated by their human spirits need to be led to a place of repentance. Those being influenced by demonic spirits need to have that spirit cast out, and that is done with much prayer and fasting not having congregational votes or stirring strife.

Recently I had an experience where it was a clear operation of *the gift of discerning of spirits*.

We had a lady attend church. All of a sudden the only thing anybody could hear during the worship time was this woman singing. She was louder than the PA system!

Soon she started trying to get ahead of the worship pastor and lead the congregation herself. This was a demonic influence going on. We had to stop and take control of the situation.

May God grant us all the wisdom to discern the difference between His Spirit, the human spirit, and demonic spirits.