

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS-FAITH
SPIRITUAL GIFTS PART 8
1 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10
1207
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Dr. Joseph Parker--The People's Bible; pastor of the City Temple in London.

Parker died. Would have rolled over in his grave to hear the teaching of his successor. Dr. Parker's successor described cherished fundamental tenets of the evangelical faith as childish things to be put away, even deriding forgiveness by blood as slaughter-house religion.

On Monday morning, April 25, 1907, people going to work in London, England, were shocked to see chalked on the front of the famous City Temple the word ICHABOD. The newspapers carried pictures of the unspeakable desecration in their afternoon editions.

A week or so later a house painter came forward voluntarily to admit that he had chalked the word early that Monday morning.

Asked in court why he had done such a sacrilegious thing, the house painter replied, "Dr. Parker told me to do it!" Dr. Parker, the former pastor, was long since dead.

The puzzled court asked for an explanation. The painter explained that he was a Christian and regular attendant at the City Temple during the days when Dr. Joseph Parker was the preacher. He told how Dr. Parker had said that if ever the false "gospel" of the higher critics was preached in that place, ICHABOD (which means "the glory is departed") should be written over the front of the building. "I did what Dr. Parker asked me to, sir."

The painter, perhaps rash in his action, was right in his discernment.

Not everything religious should be accepted as truly Christian and Biblical. To distinguish the spurious from the genuine we need discernment. We should be especially thankful for those with the gift of discernment.

REACHING PEOPLE: Apostleship-Evangelism-Miracles-Healing-Mercy

MATURING CHRISTIANS: Prophecy-Teaching-Wisdom-Knowledge-Encouragement-Giving-Helps-Distinguishing Between Spirits-Faith-Tongues-Interpreting Tongues

ORGANIZING THE CHURCH TO REACH PEOPLE AND TO MATURE CHRISTIANS: Administration-Leadership-Pastoring

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8.

DEFINITION

The gift of distinguishing between spirits is the ability to differentiate between holy, human, and demonic powers.

The Greek root for discern, *diakrino*, means "to judge through, to see through to the truth, to truly evaluate something." So, discerning spirits is simply to evaluate the spirit--whether it is God or a spirit other than the Holy Spirit.

THE NEED FOR DISCERNMENT

Major conflict is being waged between God and His forces, and Satan and his cohorts. Satan doesn't always oppose God directly but often tries to impede by counterfeit.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 11:13-15: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness"

2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1-3, and Jude 4

The Satanic counterfeiter makes these imitations:

For Christ there is Antichrist

For true prophets there are false prophets

For true apostles there are false apostles

For wheat there are tares
For sheep there are wolves in sheep's clothing
For the Holy Spirit and holy angels there are unclean spirits

Though the Christian is forbidden by god's Word to traffic in any way in spiritism (Deut. 18:10-14), he may have to confront false religion promoted by seducing spirits. Such false teachings Paul dubs "doctrines of devils" (1 Tim 4:1).

When a Christian is faced with the supernatural, he is not to mistakenly identify the supernatural with the divine and thus uncritically accept all spirits. Nor is he to be overcritical lest he despise prophesying and quench the Spirit (1 Thes. 5:19,20).

How do we tell the genuine from the spurious? For this we need discernment.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF DISCERNMENT

When Peter affirmed the deity of Jesus, the latter recognized the divine source of his declaration. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven" (Matt 16:17).

A moment later when Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about His coming death, Jesus readily discerned the satanic source of Peter's words. "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (v.23)

READ ACTS 16:16-22.

In Philippi a girl possessed with the spirit of divination, who brought her masters much gain, began to follow Paul and his company day after day, crying out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." Paul discerned this to be an unclean spirit and ordered it out of her in the name of Jesus. Her resultant healing removed her money-making powers, which in turn incurred the wrath of her masters and brought on the arrest and beating of Paul and Silas.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF DISCERNMENT

Natural discernment is possible for every man, Christian or not. Sometimes we call it good judgment or horse sense--the ability to make wise decisions by observing and understanding. Some people have more of this than others, but it can be learned. All of us should be alert to do this.

Spiritual discernment comes to a believer as he grows in Christ (Eph 4:14-15) It is connected to a great extent with knowledge of the Bible and with spiritual growth in our lives. It comes with the sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 5:14 "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Example:

Jesus Christ Superstar features a Jesus who wavered as to His own identity and who was left in the tomb.

The movie version of *Godspell*, portrays Jesus as a teacher and friend rather than a divine person. The same release referring to the movie, *The Rebel Jesus*, says it's more the such truncated views of the person of Christ give unmistakable hint that the Jesus portrayed in these films is not the Christ of Spirit-breathed Scriptures.

Gifted discernment is that which the Holy Spirit gives to some believers as a special gift, enabling them to serve the church as watchmen, to identify by supernatural insight what is not truth.

Example:

1 John 4:2,3

"Spirit, you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Saviour of the world--do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood for the remission of sin?"

Tested the spirit to find it counterfeit.

PURPOSES FOR THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS: WATCHMAN OVER THE CHURCH

Discriminate between that which is raised up by God and that which pretends to be

Unmask Satan's trickery

Detect false teachings

Ferret out false teachers

Sense carnal or fleshly elements which are intruding into worship. It is possible that the truly Christ-oriented character that we should reflect can be stained by our seeing to glorify self instead of the Lord of grace.

Identify demonism

Differentiate between demon influence and mental illness. Many Christian psychologists believe both are possible, and God many use this gift to enable them to recognize the cause of abnormal behavior.

Spot spiritual phonies: "Something's wrong in that person's life. I don't know what it is, but something is wrong." While I would blissfully go on, thinking the best, something is wrong. Sometimes, someone will say to me, "You better not put that person in that position. Something is not right". He is protecting the church

Identify one in whom the Holy Spirit is genuinely working. My friend will often say to me, "There is a person really energized by the Spirit of God"

Distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error Perhaps the gift of discernment can be used when two Christians are arguing. Instead of going to a pagan court, they are brought before some people who will make a judgment (1 Cor. 6:5). Someone with the gift of discernment might be able to determine who is right and who is wrong.

Protect the church or an individual when things are said to the church which claim to be directly from the Holy Spirit, i.e., a prophetic statement, a teaching, or a word of wisdom or knowledge.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

- * An acute awareness of what is going on behind the scenes in the spirit world
- * A good grasp of Scriptural truth in general
- * A deep underlying spirit of conviction which will not allow rest when people are being given half-truth, misapplied truth, or false teaching, and are asked to act upon it
- * An insight into people and their motives that causes those people to be uncomfortable in your presence
- * A sensitivity to the origin of a power or an ability. They cannot explain this and their only justification lies in the fact that events confirm them
- * A sensation of being "hit" by evil forces when they realize they have been discovered
- * An inward restlessness when human thoughts are held up as prophecy, when a clever human compromise seems to be a word of wisdom, or when anti-divine powers creep in under the cloak of spiritual statements
- * Beware of a spirit of clairvoyance

FAITH

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:9.

MORE THAN SAVING FAITH

SAVING FAITH: No one can enter the Christian life without exercising genuine faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

LIVING CHRISTIAN FAITH: To continue the Christian life also requires faith. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

MOUNTAIN-MOVING FAITH: The inclusion of mountain-moving faith in the list of gifts distinguishes it from saving faith (2 Cor. 13:2).

DEFINITION

The gift of faith is a Spirit-given ability to see something that God wants done and to believe that God will do it--regardless of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Perhaps synonymous with vision. This person has the same problems as all others, but can see right through the problems to the resources of God.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF FAITH

Romans 4 speaks of Abraham's unusual ability to believe God's promises is praised by Paul. According to Romans 4:20, "yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God." Abraham received a promise of what God intended to do. He believed that God would bring it to pass and God did and is doing so.

Paul, several times in his ministry as revealed in the book of Acts, seems to display evidence of the gift of faith. He received in his unusual call a vision of what he was to do for God (see Acts 9:15, 26:16-20) and he clung to this vision throughout his lifetime (see 2 Tim 4:7,8).

Further illustrations in Paul's life include his Macedonian call (Acts 16), his unshakable assurance that God would have him witness before kings and rulers in Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 21:9-14, 26:19, 23:11, 28:14), his experience at Corinth in which God revealed to him what would happen and gave assurance (Acts 18:10,11), his unusual experience in the ship (Acts 27:22-26).

Hebrews 11. Consider:

Abel and his sacrifice

Noah and his unorthodox carpentry

Abraham looking at Isaac on the altar

Moses and his vision of freedom

Joshua and his commitment to victory

David and his assurance that God would give him the kingdom

ACTS 16: Paul and Silas sang praises in a Philippian jail.

To some among us the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith. These gifted men and women become our visionaries. They see beyond the current crop of problems and are not stymied by the "seven last words of the church" ("We've never done it that way before").

In these last decades of the 20th century, we live in an era of unprecedented self-dependence. But perhaps, after years of human effort, the church is ready to recognize itself as the unique possession of a unique God. Perhaps men and women with the gift of faith can lead us in "looking to Jesus" as did the faith heroes recorded in Hebrews 11.

GEORGE MUELLER

Any discussion of the gift of faith must include the life and ministry of George Mueller, who by faith operated an orphanage in Bristol, England. He cared for 10,000 orphans over a period of 60 years, receiving \$5 million in the process.

He began the work with only two shillings in his pocket. Without once making known any need, he received enough to build five large homes, able to house 2,000 orphans, and to feed the children day by day, all by faith and prayer. Never did they go without a meal. Often the pantry was bare when the children sat down to eat, but help always arrived in the nick of time.

One morning when not a speck of food or milk was on hand to feed the hundreds of hungry orphans seated expectantly at the breakfast table, Mr Mueller prayed, "Father, we thank Thee for the food Thou are going to give us." Came a knock at the door. A baker stood there. "I was awakened at 2 a.m. and felt I should bake some bread for you." A few minutes later came another knock. A milkman said, "My mild wagon just broke down in front of your place. I must get rid of these cans of milk before I can take the wagon for repairs. Can you use this milk?" Mueller testified that thousand of times they were without food for another meal and without funds, but not once did God fail to provide food.

Some people see that and think, "boy, I wish I could do that. That doesn't happen to me." Whip themselves because aren't like Mueller, but Mueller had the special gift of faith. You and I may or may not have that gift of seeing beyond what others can see.

A trans-Atlantic sea captain, after 22 hours on the ship's bridge in a dense fog off the banks of Newfoundland, was startled by a tap on the shoulder. It was Mueller, then in his 70s. "Captain, I have come to tell you I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon." This was Wednesday.

When the captain said it was impossible, Mueller replied, "If your boat can't take me, God will find some other way. I've never broken an engagement in 57 years".

"I'd like to help," responded the captain, "but what can I do?"

"Let's go below and pray," Mueller suggested.

"But Mr. Mueller, don't you know how dense the fog is?"

"My eye is not on the fog, but on God who controls the fog and every circumstance of my life."

Down on his knees, Mueller prayed the simplest prayer the captain had ever heard. In his opinion it fit a child of nine. "O Lord, if Thou wilt, remove this fog in five minutes. Thou dost know the engagement made for me in Quebec for Saturday."

Putting his hand on the captain's shoulder, Mueller restrained him from praying. "First, you don't believe God will do it, and second, I believe He has done it, so there's no need for you to pray. Open the door, Captain, and you'll find the fog gone."

And so it was. Mueller kept his Saturday engagement in Quebec. Modestly, Mueller wrote, "It pleased the Lord to give me in some cases something like the gift of faith, so that unconditionally I could ask and look for an answer.

Mueller always first satisfied himself that he was doing God's will before he started a project. Then, resting on the promises of the Bible, he came boldly to the throne in prayer. Once he was persuaded that a thing was right, he went on praying for it till the answer came. He said, "I never give up! Ten of thousands of times have my prayers been answered!"

A Stickler for details, he kept a complete record of prayers; it covered 3,000 pages, contained nearly a million words, and chronicled over 50,000 specific answers.

KNOWING GOD'S WILL OR INTENTION

The gift of faith can make the impossible possible. Of course, there is one limitation: my desires must correspond to God's desires.

Not Name It and Claim It.

The gift of faith prompts prayer like that of Jesus when He raised Lazarus. Jesus thanked the Father in advance, as though the answer were an accomplished fact. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 11:41, 42).

Often our desires correspond to God's will but our weak faith hinders God. This faith is the firm knowledge God wants to do a miracle here. This knowledge leads to action, the believer living as if God's expected intervention is already a reality.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GIFT OF FAITH

- * An unusual desire to accept God's promises at face value and to apply them until God fulfills them
- * An often recurring insight or vision of what God intends to do
- * A consistent believing in the plan of God despite great odds, troubles, trials, or opposition
- * The recurring experience of sensing that God is going to do something unusual even though most others do not have this kind of assurance
- * The recurring of the prayer of faith that allows prayer for something only once and receives assurance that the prayer has been heard and answered although a long period of time may elapse before the answer is seen

- * An unusual desire to know God and to trust Him and Him alone for solutions to problems
- * The thrill of knowing that God is real because He has often and specifically answered prayer requests
- * An attitude not only that God "can" but that He "will" and already "has done so" in various situations

FAITH IS THE VICTORY.

The Christian with the gift of faith is able to see what others cannot see, to endure what others cannot endure, and to genuinely trust God when there seems to be no human or natural basis for that trust.