

Discerning of Spirits

Biblical

1 Corinthians 12:10

"Distinguishing of spirits" - NAS

"Distinguishing between spirits" - NIV

"Discerning of spirits" - NKJV

Hebrews 5:14 –

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Philippians 1:9 -

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.
(NAS)

1 Kings 3:9 –

Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

(Discern: Hebrew Shema – Sense of Hearing).

Daniel 2:21-

He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. (NIV)

(*biynah /bee-naw/* - can be linked with the Hebrew word "to discern by senses".)

Malachi 3:18 -

So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (NAS)

(Distinguish: Hebrew means to "return to see")

Hosea 4:6 -

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. (NIV)

Yada 848 - יָדָע (*yāda`*) know. (RSV, ASV similar.)

This root, occurring a total of 944 times, is used in every stem and expresses a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses. Its closest synonyms are *bîn* "to discern" and *nākar* "to recognize."



Historical Perspective

Novation (The Trinity, Novatian AD 210-280):

This is He [Holy Spirit] who places prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works, offers discrimination of spirits, affords powers, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts are of charismata; thus making the Lord's Church everywhere, and in all, perfected and completed.

Anthony (AD 251-356) was said to have possessed the gift of discerning of Spirits and often knew things supernaturally. His prayers brought healing to the sick and deliverance to the demonized.

George Fox (1624-1691) the founder of the Quakers experienced the revelation gifts of the Holy Spirit such as discerning of Spirits, the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom. "The Lord gave me a spirit of discerning, by which I at many times saw the states and conditions of people and could try the spirits." (2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity, p. 92)

John Fletcher (1729-1785) *Christ Manifested* – "a regenerate soul has its spiritual senses opened, and made capable of discerning what belongs to the spiritual world, in the same way that a newly born infant has his natural sense unlocked, and begins to see, hear, and taste what belongs to that material world into which he is entering."

Agnes Ozman (1870-1937) In a Watch night Service. **(1900-1901)** Humble in the name of Jesus, I laid my hand upon her head and prayed. I had scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking in the Chinese language and was unable to speak in English for three days. (2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity, p. 139.)

Charles Parham (1873-1929) **January 3, 1901** - Sister Stanley told Charles Parham at Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas "Just before you entered tongues of fire were sitting above their heads." (2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity, p. 139)

Bob Jones – Shepherd's Rod, January 2000 - One of the most notable promises given this year is the release of spiritual discernment on a greatly heightened scale. Universally, the church has been dreadfully lacking in spiritual discernment. Not only is spiritual sensitivity needed in rightly dividing the Word but also in discerning one another within the body and the revelations given to us by the Holy Spirit. These spiritual revelations will also be discerned through the five natural senses. The sense of taste, smell, sight, sound and touch will become increasingly sensitive to the realm of the Spirit providing additional illumination of the times and seasons ahead and the things that we ought to do in preparation for them.... The five senses will become sensitive to spiritual reality.



Spiritual discernment and a good foundation in Truth must be functioning to protect us from the great deception that will be prevailing in this generation. The Scripture foretells there will be those casting out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead that do not even know the Lord whose end is outer darkness. Sensitive discernment must be released to rightly discern the body. We are not admonished by Scripture to judge works, but fruit. John the Baptist came to his generation with one of the most important messages ever delivered to mankind, still very few possessed the spiritual discernment to recognize the divine deposit in him nor the eternal message he delivered.

Wigglesworth: The Discerning of Spirits [1]

"To another discerning of spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10). There is a vast difference between natural discernment and spiritual. When it comes to natural discernment you will find many people loaded with it, and they can see so many faults in others. To such the words of Christ in the sixth chapter of Luke surely apply, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" If you want to manifest natural discernment, focus the same on yourself for at least twelve months and you will see so many faults in yourself that you will never want to fuss about the faults of another. In the sixth of Isaiah, we read of the prophet being in the presence of God and he found that even his lips were unclean, and everything was unclean. But praise God, there is the same live coal for us today, the baptism of fire, the perfecting of the heart, the purifying of the mind, the regeneration of the spirit. How important it is that the fire of God shall touch our tongues.

In 1 John 4:1 we are told, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." We are further told, "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." From time to time as I have seen a person under the power of evil, or having a fit.... It is then, remembering that further statement of John's, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world," that you can in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ deal with the evil powers and command them to come out. We as Pentecostal people must know the tactics of the evil one and must be able to displace and dislodge him from his position.

I was preaching in Doncaster, England, at one time on the line of faith and a number of people were delivered. There was a man present who was greatly interested and moved by what he saw. He was suffering himself with a stiff knee and had yards and yards of flannel wound around it. After he got home, he said to his wife, "I have taken in Wigglesworth's message and now I am going to act on it and get deliverance. Wife, I want you to be the audience." He took hold of his knee and said, "Come out, you devil, in the name of Jesus." Then he said, "It is all right, wife." He took the yards and yards of flannel off and found he was all right without the bandage. The next night he went to the little Primitive Methodist Church where he worshiped. There were a lot of young people who were in bad plight there and Jack had a tremendous business delivering his friends through the name of Jesus. He had been given to see that a great many ills to which flesh is heir are nothing else but the operation of the enemy, but his faith had risen, and he saw that in the name of Jesus there was a power that was more than a match for the enemy.

I arrived one night at Gottenberg in Sweden and was asked to hold a meeting there. In the midst of the meeting a man fell full length in the doorway. The evil spirit drew him down, manifesting itself and disturbing the whole meeting. I rushed to the door and laid hold of this man and cried out to the evil spirit within him, "Come out, you devil! In the name of Jesus we cast you out as an evil spirit." I lifted him up and said, "Stand on your feet and walk in the name of Jesus." I don't know whether anybody in the meeting understood me except the



interpreter, but the devils knew what I said. I talked in English but these devils in Sweden cleared out. A similar thing happened in Christiania.

The devil will endeavor to fascinate through the eyes and through the mind. At one time there was brought to me a beautiful young woman who had been fascinated with some preacher, and just because he had not given her satisfaction on the line of courtship and marriage, the devil took advantage and made her fanatical and mad. They brought her 250 miles in that condition. She had previously received the Baptism in the Spirit. You ask, "Is there any place for the enemy in one that has been baptized in the Holy Ghost?" Our only safety is in going on with God and in constantly being filled with the Holy Ghost. You must not forget Demas. He must have been baptized with the Holy Ghost for he appears to have been a right-hand worker with Paul, but the enemy got him to the place where he loved this present world and he dropped off. When they brought this young woman to me the evil power was immediately discerned and immediately, I cast the thing out in the name of Jesus. It was a great joy to present her before all the people in her right mind again.

There is a life of perfect deliverance, and this is where God wants you to be. If I find my peace is disturbed on any line, I know it is the enemy who is trying to work. How do I know this? Because the Lord has promised to keep your mind in perfect peace when it is stayed on Him. Paul tells us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service; the Holy Spirit breathes through him, "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." He further tells us in Philippians 4, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." As we think about that which is pure, we become pure. As we think about that which is holy, we become holy. And as we think about our Lord Jesus Christ, we become like Him. We are changed into the likeness of the object on which our gaze is fixed.

To discern spirits, we must dwell with Him who is holy, and He will give the revelation and unveil the mask of Satanic power on all lines. In Australia I went to one place where there were disrupted and broken homes. The people were so deluded by the evil power of Satan that men had left their wives, and wives had left their husbands, and had gotten into spiritual affinity with one another. That is the devil! May God deliver us from such evils in these days. There is no one better than the companion God has given you. I have seen so many broken hearts and so many homes that have been wrecked. We need a real revelation of these evil seducing spirits which come in and fascinate by the eye and destroy lives and bring the work of God into disrepute. But there is always flesh behind it. It is never clean; it is unholy, impure, Satanic, devilish, and hell is behind it. If the enemy comes in to tempt you on any line like this, I beseech you to look instantly to the Lord Jesus. He can deliver you from any such Satanic power. You must be separated on all lines if you are going to have faith.

The Holy Ghost will give us this gift of discerning of spirits if we desire it so that we may perceive by revelation this evil power which comes in to destroy. We can reach out and get this unction of the Spirit that will reveal these things unto us.

You will have people come to meetings who are spiritists. You must be able to deal with spiritist conditions. You can so deal with them that they will not have any power in the meetings. If you ever have Theosophists or Christian Scientists, you must be able to discern them and settle them. Never play with them; always clear them out. They are better with their own company always, unless they are willing to be delivered from the delusion,



they are in. Remember the warning of the Lord Jesus, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."

Before Satan can bring his evil spirits there has to be an open door. Hear what the Scriptures say

"That wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18).

"The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul" (Psa. 121:7). How does Satan get an opening? When the saint ceases to seek after holiness, purity, righteousness, truth; when he ceases to pray, stops reading the Word and gives way to carnal appetites, then it is that Satan comes. So often sickness comes as a result of disobedience. David said, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." Seek the Lord and He will sanctify every thought, every act, till your whole being is ablaze with holy purity and your one desire will be for Him who has created you in holiness. Oh, this holiness! Can we be made pure? We can. Every inbred sin must go. God can cleanse away every evil thought. Can we have a hatred for sin and a love for righteousness? Yes, God will create within thee a pure heart. He will take away the stony heart out of the flesh. He will sprinkle thee with clean water and thou shalt be cleansed from all thy filthiness. When will He do it? When you seek Him for such inward purity.

Derek Prince on Discerning Spirits [2]

Let me first of all try to define what's meant by "to distinguish" or "to discern." I understand it to mean the ability to recognize, identify and distinguish between various kinds of spirits that confront us. I'll say that again: the ability to recognize, identify and distinguish between various kinds of spirits that confront us. And in this connection, we need to bear in mind that the Christian ministry is a ministry in the spiritual realm. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul says we are not fighting enemies of flesh and blood or persons with bodies, but we are arrayed against an evil spiritual kingdom, spirits of wickedness. And so, it is essential that we are equipped to handle our spiritual enemies.

The purposes of this gift, I would suggest, are fourfold. First of all, to lift the veil that covers the unseen spiritual world. The world that we really have to deal with if we're to be effective.

Secondly, to enable us to see as God sees. In 1 Samuel 16:7 the Lord told Samuel this, "For God sees not as man sees, for man look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." This gift of discerning of distinguishing of spirits enables us to go below the outward appearance and see the condition of the heart.

The third purpose of the gift is to protect us from deception. We are reminded that sometimes Satan comes to God's people as an angel of light. He appears to be very beautiful, very good and very wise. But his whole purpose and intention is evil and destructive.

The fourth purpose of this gift is to enable us to diagnose people's problems and so help them.

Now the gift is discerning of spirits, it's not just discerning of evil spirits. There are various kind of spirits that confront us in the Christian walk. Let me mention four: First of all, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. It is very important to discern the Holy Spirit. Secondly, there are angels, both good angels and evil angels. Thirdly, there are demons or unclean spirits. And fourthly, there is the spirit of man, the human spirit.



Now I want to give you some examples of the operation of this gift from the New Testament. First of all in the ministry of Jesus. In John 1:47 and following, you read how Nathanael came to Jesus and it says:

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!’” (NAS)

How did Jesus know that there was no guile in Nathanael? There was no outward way of knowing it, but He discerned in Nathanael a guileless spirit. Nathanael was amazed.

“He said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’” (NAS- v. 48)

Probably Jesus was standing preaching and Philip was standing there somewhere in the background under the fig tree listening, but Jesus looking over the heads of those who were closer to Him, saw that face and discerned that guileless spirit. Nathanael was amazed, but Jesus said to him, “This is only the beginning.”

“And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’” (NAS - v. 51)

Jesus said, in effect, not merely will we discern human spirits, but we’ll discern angel spirits too. And of course, later on in the New Testament this was fulfilled a number of times. For instance, in Acts 27 we read about Paul on the ship that was being so terribly tossed by the storm. They hadn’t seen the sun or the moon or the stars for many days. All hope of survival was given up, but an angel of God came to Paul on the ship. And after that Paul stood up and spoke to those men and encouraged them and he said this:

“For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’” (NAS - v. 23-24)

So, we see that an angel came to that storm-tossed ship, but the only one who was aware of the presence of the angel was Paul. Paul discerned what the others could not see, an angelic presence there on that ship.

Now also from the ministry of Paul, I want to give you an example of discerning an evil spirit, a very significant and important example. This describes what happened while Paul and Silas and their company were in the city of Philippi to bring the gospel to that city. And they were going every day to a certain place of prayer, but there was a slave-girl following them making dramatic spiritual pronouncements about them. This is the record as we find it in Acts 16:16–18:

“And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling.” (NAS- v. 16)

The spirit of divination in Satan’s kingdom is the fortunetelling spirit, the one that predicts the future, that tells you whether you are going to be rich or poor, whether you are going to marry a blonde or a brunette, whether your mother or your aunt is going to die, and many such things. That’s the spirit of divination, the fortunetelling spirit. It is not from God; it is from Satan. The Scripture then goes on to say:



“Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, ‘These men are bondservants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.’” (NAS - v.17)

It is very significant that what she was saying was absolutely true. That is an example of Satan coming as an angel of light. But she was nevertheless not serving God, but Satan. You see, Satan’s purpose was to confuse the people of Philippi. They were used to divination; they were used to people with evil spirits. If Paul and his company had accepted this girl and her testimony, the people of Philippi would have concluded, “Well, here is just another example of what we have been used to all these centuries.” But Paul didn’t fall into that trap. Through discerning of spirits, he identified the spirit as an evil spirit, and this is how he dealt with it:

“And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed... [Do you know that it is legitimate sometimes to be annoyed? To be annoyed with the devil is not a sin.] ...But Paul was greatly annoyed and turned and said to the spirit [not to the girl, but to the spirit], ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!’ And it [the spirit] came out at that very moment.” (NAS - v. 18)

So, the evil spirit was discerned by Paul and then cast out in the name of Jesus. That was a critical point. It set the whole city in an uproar. Satan’s purposes had been revealed and frustrated and he became exceedingly angry, and the most unnatural tumult broke out in that city. That was Satan’s response to his devices being revealed.

Now let me give you just one example that is a little similar from my own personal experience. Actually, this incident in my life is mentioned in Catherine Marshall’s book *Something More*. It happened while I was ministering at a church in Chicago. At the close of a service a lady came to me and asked me for prayer. She said she had personal problems. The Lord showed me, I think, probably through the word of knowledge, that she had been a spiritist medium. And I said that I wasn’t prepared to pray for her. So, she went away but came back a few weeks later. She said, “I have given up being a medium. I want you to pray for me.” So, I felt that I couldn’t refuse. I wasn’t confident of her sincerity, but I began to pray with her, and it was hard going.

After a while I paused for a moment. And as I paused, she began to look at me intently and there was a kind of strange, fixed stare in her eyes and she said, “I see you in a car and it’s wrecked against a tree and there’s blood.” For a moment my heart sank, and I thought, “I’m going to be in a car that’s wrecked against a tree.” And then I realized that isn’t the Holy Spirit. That’s the spirit of divination by which she operated as a medium. And so, the anger of God came over me and I said, “You divining spirit, I reject you! I do not accept that as my destiny! I’m not going to be in any car that’s going to be wrecked against a tree! I refuse it! I will not accept it from you!”

I don’t believe that the woman was delivered. At least not at that time. Because I really don’t believe that she had repented of her evil practices. But I really believe that that was a turning point in my life.

You see, when you go to a fortuneteller, the fortuneteller predicts something evil about your life, as often happens. If you say, “Oh, isn’t this terrible! Think what’s going to happen to me!” in a certain sense you are submitting to Satan’s destiny for your life. And if you submit to it, very probably it will be worked out. What we have to learn to do is identify Satan even in his deceptions, reject him, turn away from him, turn to God and the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, and receive God’s destiny for our life and believe that rather than Satan’s destiny.



But these days it's very important that we are able to discern even when Satan comes to us in the guise of an angel of light.

All right. Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. tomorrow I'll continue with this theme of spiritual gifts, and I'll be speaking on the first of the gifts of power, the gift of faith.

Discernment

Bibliography

[1] S. Wigglesworth, "Smith Wigglesworth | Bibliography | Sermons."

<http://www.smithwigglesworth.com/sermons/eif17.htm> (accessed Nov. 17, 2021).

[2] "Discerning of Spirits | Podcast | Derek Prince Ministries." <https://www.derekprince.com/radio/229> (accessed Nov. 17, 2021).

