

## Discernment and Discerning of spirits

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**Introduction:** Let's pray using Phil 1:9-11:

*9 And this I pray, that **your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment**, 10 so that you may **approve the things that are excellent**, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

**Testimony:** In 1987 I was quite foolish. Team from Anaheim Vineyard conducted a conference at HFC on Power Evangelism and spiritual gifts. As I looked down the list of workshops, I liked the ones about power evangelism, spiritual gifts and healing. I thought about which spiritual gifts I wanted to ask for. But I would definitely not ask for discerning of spirits, because I didn't want to cast out demons, mainly because they scared me. And no way was I going to the deliverance workshop! Then God started talking. Oh really? Not going? After some argument, I relented and enrolled for the deliverance workshop.

In what way was I foolish? (Well, other than resisting God??!) I thought of discernment of spirits as a gift in a little box. I thought that if I had this gift, I would have to cast out demons. I had no idea it was for anything beyond casting out demons. I did not realize that discernment is essential and applicable to absolutely everything! I didn't know it was strongly related to knowledge and wisdom, and that all of them are essential for walking in the pathway of the Lord.

**Prov 2:1-22** - *My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, 2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; 4 If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. 9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course. 10 For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, 12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; 13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness; 14 Who delight in doing evil And rejoice in the perversity of evil; 15 Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways; 16 To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words; 17 That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God; 18 For her house sinks down to death And her tracks lead to the dead; 19 None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life. 20 So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous. 21 For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; 22 But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.*

- need to seek discernment, understanding and wisdom.
- need to walk in godly ways.
- walking in ungodliness destroys discernment!

**Discerning of Spirits** is the supernatural capacity to judge from a spiritual insight whether the spirit operating has a source that is human, demonic, or divine. It is supernatural perception into the spiritual realm for the purpose of determining the source of the spiritual activity. eg: Acts 13:6-12, 1 John 4:1,2

In order to walk in the Lord we really need to discern the source of all our own thoughts and ideas....our very direction for each step of our path through the details of our day, as well as just prophetic words we might hear or read!

### **How can we discern the true prophetic words from false?**

A. **Remember, we see darkly and in part!** *1 Corinthians 13:8-12 -- 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

The little we do know and see is easily distorted by our own dirt, our own perceptions and our own arrogance. May we remember that we see only dimly and in part. May we always approach the prophetic with humility.

B. **Know the true - Know God's word!!** When financial institutions train counterfeit experts, they don't concentrate on giving them fakes. They work very hard to become familiar with the genuine in every minute detail. Trained this way, they are much more effective at detecting counterfeits than if they had specialized in examining the counterfeits.

This is also true in the spiritual realm. We will be much better at discerning truth from error if we focus on the truth....not the error. Focus on the Lord, not the enemy!

Counterfeit words will be close to the real thing. (Counterfeits are as close as possible to the real thing, and so they can effectively deceive.)

### **Knowing the true - responding to natural revelation**

***Ps 19:1-14** The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

***Rom 1:20-25** For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

### **Responding to God's word**

**Ps 19:7** *The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.*

**C. 12 Who can discern his errors? Psalm 19:12-14** *Acquit me of hidden faults. 13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

We are blinded in the areas of our own errors, bondages and sins. And our hearts are deceitful. But consistent walking in obediently in the pathway of the Lord will bring us face into the light.

**Prov 4:18-23** - *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble. 20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body. 23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.*

**D. The fruit test - Read: Matthew 7:15-25** - This test takes time, as fruit takes time to grow. We can ask of any word or direction: What is the result? Is this leading us closer to Jesus? Is Jesus magnified? Or are we going off on a tangent? Was it just an empty experience?

**E. Discernment belongs to the body.** Prophecy best exercised in the body of Christ, where people, ideally including leaders and elders, can hear and test it. *1 Cor. 14:29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.*

**Some warnings -**

**F. Beware popular trends.** When I look the Bible, I see individuals bringing prophetic words. Usually the person is identified by name. The only incidence of a "prophecy by committee" that I have found in the Bible is found in 1 Kings 22:1-28. (and 2 Chronicles 18). 400 prophets got it wrong!

**G. Beware of seeking some kind of prophetic word instead of seeking God himself?** The Holy Spirit is not a fortune teller! He is God. Do not ask others to "listen to God" for you and advise you what to do. Do not consult people who you hear can prophesy, and don't use your prayer partners this way. Also, do not allow someone else to use you like this. This is nothing but fortune telling dressed up in Christian clothes. No good will come of it and it may do much harm.

**H. Every word must be tested.** Don't receive a word just because it is spoken by a renowned "prophet." Even experienced prophetic people sometimes get it wrong!

*1 Thess 5:19-22 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil. NIV*

**I. "She has a "Jezebel spirit." -- Accusation and slander are not discernment.** It is Satan who accuses and slanders. We find him doing so in God's very presence in the books of Job, Zechariah and in Revelation we see Satan being thrown down from the place where he has power to accuse. (Job 1:8-12, 2:1-6, Zech 3:1, Rev 12:9-11) When we accuse and slander, we stand in Satan's place! He's been thrown out of heaven, but we stand there in God's presence and take his place!

**J. Suspicion, criticism and judgment are not discernment.** They are a kind of counterfeit discernment, because they rise up out of our flesh, not coming down from above from the Father of Lights who gives us every good and perfect gift. True discernment can see because it is looking at Jesus. Our focus is Jesus....let us look at everything reflected through his eyes!

*James 1:14-17 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*

**K. How do our prophetic words measure up to their purpose as stated in 1 Cor 14:3?** *3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*

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*1 Thess 5:19-24 1 Thess 5:19-24 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*  
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