

Discernment—the Most Neglected of All Spiritual Gifts

Those who walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit have access to the nine “power gifts” mentioned in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. These gifts include prophecy, speaking in tongues, miracles and healing—and many Christians are eager to receive these supernatural manifestations of God’s power.

While we know God can perform such wonders today, we also know Satan can counterfeit them. Jesus Himself warned that false prophets and false teachers would gain followers because of their supernatural powers. Jesus said: “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24).

So how do we know the difference between a true Christian who operates in the power to heal or perform miracles and an imposter who relies on trickery, manipulation, sensationalism or sorcery to deceive crowds?

We desperately need to know the difference today, because an increasing number of “Christian” charlatans are emerging—especially in the developing world where churches lack biblical discipleship. Here are just a few examples:

- In November, millions of people were shocked after seeing videos of Lethebo Robalago, a pseudo-Pentecostal pastor from South Africa who claims he can heal people by spraying insect repellent in their faces. The videos posted online showed congregants allowing Robalago, of the Mount Zion General Assembly church, to spray Doom Super Multi Insect Killer into their eyes and nostrils to cure them of various diseases.
- Similar claims were made recently by Paul Sanyangore, a

self-proclaimed prophet from Zimbabwe, who recently urged his followers to drink water polluted with raw sewage in order to heal them. Not to be outdone, a South African pastor named Rufus Phala made local headlines when he convinced some of his followers to come to his church altar and drink Dittol, a highly toxic antiseptic.

- Another wildly popular evangelist in South Africa, Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering church, released a video claiming he is so anointed by God that he can walk on air. But the film clip is not convincing. It shows Bushiri walking down the staircase in his mansion, and then the camera zooms in on his feet while someone lifts his body above the carpet so he appears to float. (You can see the video [here](#).) Bushiri is reportedly worth about \$150 million because so many Africans support his work.
- Last year, viewers around the world watched in horror as a pastor from Ghana asked a pregnant woman to sit in a chair while he placed his foot on her stomach and kicked her—presumably to heal her. Worshipers in the audience can be seen applauding this man, Daniel Obinem, for his flagrant act of abuse.

I'm not surprised that a greedy charlatan would kick a woman or pretend to float on air. But I am baffled that crowds are gullible enough to drink the antiseptic and follow these phonies. Why are so many people so foolish?

The answer is actually found in the list of spiritual gifts Paul described in 1 Cor. 12:8-10. One of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit is "the discerning of spirits" (v. 10)—and it is a gift we desperately need in this season. The Greek word for "discerning" is *diakrisis*, which means to distinguish or judge something to see if it is evil or from God.

When God blessed us with the powerful gifts of the Holy Spirit, He also gave us a gift that can warn us of a

counterfeit. The gift of discernment is like a spiritual security system; when the church begins to drift into deception or when someone with impure motives or corrupt character invades the pulpit, a person with the gift of discernment can sense their internal alarm bell ringing.

A mature Christian who has overcome sinful habits and developed godly character will naturally discern whether a prophet or teacher is from God or not. If we sense pride, perversion, occultism or any other form of evil, our spirits will grow uncomfortable. We may not know exactly what is wrong with the person or his message, but we will sense danger and warn others to stay away from it. This “knowing” can feel similar to a gut instinct—but it does not originate with us; it is a warning from God.

On the flip side, a person who is not yielded to the Holy Spirit and not familiar with Scripture will be clueless when an imposter shows up. The undiscerning Christian will blindly follow a false prophet until they both fall in a ditch. And while God certainly promises to judge those who willingly deceive, those who follow charlatans also suffer consequences. Those who follow greedy prophets usually have greed in their own hearts.

Please don't be gullible. Ask God to fill you with heavenly discernment. Study the Bible daily and soak in its truth so you will immediately recognize false teaching when you hear it. Ask for the gift of discernment so a spiritual fake will never defraud you. {eoa}