

Prophet: Learning to Listen With Discernment

Learning to listen with discernment means that you begin to recognize the voice of God so well that other voices sound unfamiliar.

In John 10:5a, Jesus told his followers, “Yet they will never follow a stranger.” This statement needs to become a reality in your life. It takes practice and requires that you learn well the lessons in listening with discernment offered to all of us by the Holy Spirit.

Don’t be so overly zealous, that instead of making the time to take driver’s training classes, you quickly get into the fastest car you can find and go off to the races.

Some, sad to say, end up in a ditch or become a casualty of driving without a license! But you can avoid the ditches.

First, get your permit while being mentored by others, and then graduate to driving alone. Where hearing God is concerned, driver’s education consists of discernment lessons.

The Need for Discerning of Spirits

The gift of discerning of spirits, which is listed in the New Testament as one of the gifts of the Spirit, is desperately needed in today’s church culture. This gift helps you distinguish what motivates spiritual activity. It helps you see through the gray areas and differentiate light from darkness.

The following are some examples of the gift of discerning of spirits in operation:

- Acts 16:16-18, where Paul discerned that the power of a certain slave girl was in fact a demonic spirit.

- Acts 13:8-11, where Paul discerned that Elymas the magician was demonically energized in his attempt to oppose the presentation of the gospel.
- Acts 14:8-10, where again Paul discerned (“saw”) that a man had faith to be healed.
- When a person is able to discern whether or not a problem in someone’s life is demonic or merely the consequence of other emotional and psychological factors, or perhaps a complex combination of both.
- When people with this gift are often able to detect or discern the presence of demonic spirits in a room or some such location.
- In Acts 8:20-24, Peter was said to “see” (not physically, but to perceive or sense) that Simon Magus was filled with bitterness and iniquity.
- It would seem that Jesus exercised something along the lines of this gift when he looked at Nathanael and described him as a man “in which is no guile” (John 1:47). In John 2:25 it is said that Jesus “knew what was in man.”

Bottom line: This gift helps you to see below the bottom line!

The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing

When the outward appearance of a wolf is disguised, the human eye cannot immediately discern the wolf. However, the sheepdog will not be deceived, even by the sheep’s clothing.

He is not deceived because he does not judge by his eyesight but by his sense of smell. The wolf may look like a sheep, but he still smells like a wolf.

In Scripture, discernment is like a sense of smell, acting independently of the natural eyesight.

Isaiah the prophet, foreseeing the ministry of Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one, declares that “the spirit of the Lord ... shall make him of quick understanding [literally, quick of scent] in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” (Isa. 11:2-3, KJV).

Those to whom God commits the care of His sheep must likewise, through the Holy Spirit, be quick of scent.

Wisely Judging Revelation

What would you think if you had a spiritual experience that made your hair stand on end? Would you write it off as absolutely satanic or crazy because it didn't fit into your theological grid?

Consider some of the experiences of Daniel, Isaiah or Ezekiel recorded in the Old Testament.

Daniel lay weary for days because of the impact of a supernatural vision.

Isaiah had his lips seared by a burning coal.

Ezekiel was forced to lie on his side for 390 days straight.

Then there's Zechariah, Paul and John, the beloved disciple. An angel strikes Zechariah dumb; Paul is blinded; and John sees visions of such magnitude that the entire book of Revelation is inadequate to record them.

We need the gift of discernment, don't we?

Most of us in the Western world, if confronted with such events, would tend to chalk them up to psychological disturbances or the devil.

Entire segments of the body of Christ have written off hearing from the Lord because of fears about being deceived and led

astray.

It's true that such experiences can come from the supernatural power of the enemy, from the human mind or from God Himself. Yet God wants us to recognize His voice, and our master is very capable of preserving us from harm and deception.

We can trust our Father. If we ask Him for the things of the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ, we will get the real things, not counterfeits. Two of His best gifts are wisdom and discernment. We need to stick close to Jesus and ask God to enable us to grow in them!

9 Scriptural Tests for Receiving Divine Revelation

The only way we can accurately and safely approach interpreting the motivation behind revelatory activity of any kind is to ask God for the spirit of wisdom and understanding. God still speaks today through many different avenues, including visions, dreams, His inner voice, His external audible voice, His creation and so forth.

Yet our most important source of revelation is the canon of Scripture. Since the Bible is our absolute standard against which we must test spiritual experiences, let's look at nine scriptural tests.

To be assured of receiving accurate and valid revelation, we can apply the following list of nine scriptural tests.

1. Does the revelation edify, exhort or console? (See 1 Cor. 14:3, 26.)
2. Is it in agreement with God's Word? (See 2 Tim. 3:16.)
3. Does it exalt Jesus Christ? (See John 16:14 and Rev. 19:10.)
4. Does it have good fruit? (See Matt. 7:15-16, Gal. 5:22-23 and Eph. 5:9.)

5. If it predicts a future event, does it come to pass? (See Deut. 18:22.)

6. Does the revelatory turn people toward God or away from Him? (See Deut. 13:1-5.)

7. Does it produce liberty or bondage? (See Rom. 8:15, 1 Cor. 14:33 and 2 Tim. 1:7.)

8. Does it produce life or death? “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (See 2 Cor. 3:6, MEV.)

9. Does the Holy Spirit bear witness that it is true? (See 1 John 2:27 and John 16:13.)

May God give us the ability to walk in the grace of discerning His voice from all the “voices of strangers.” May you experience the fullness of the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (see Eph. 1:17-19).

Let’s pause to lift a prayer for listening with discernment:

Father God, Your Word tells me to not despise prophesying, to test all things and to hold fast to what is good. Teach me to discern Your voice. I lift up Your Word as my standard. Help me to be a wise steward of Your grace, dear Lord. Teach me to discern good from evil. Grant me a listening heart filled with wisdom and discernment. In Jesus’ mighty name. Amen. {eoa}

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