

Discernment, Deception and One Prayer We Should All Say

As I travel the nation teaching spiritual warfare principles, one truth becomes painfully clear: the body of Christ, at large, lacks discernment.

The reality is many have simply not been activated or trained to discern spirits. Yet discernment is a vital gift in this hour as false prophets, false teachers and even false christs are rising around the world with smooth sayings, rhymes and riddles.

Discerning of spirits is one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. It is the Holy Spirit-inspired ability to distinguish between the operations of the Holy Spirit, a demon spirit or the human spirit. Discerning of spirits is especially helpful in prophecy, when we need to test the spirits to see if they are God (1 John 4:1). It's also vital in spiritual warfare so that we accurately determine what we're battling instead of just beating the air through guessing games (1 Cor. 9:26).

Do We All Have Discernment?

Although the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts as He wills—and some people clearly operate in the gift of discerning of spirits at a high level—I believe all Christians should desire to grow in discernment. With apostasy rising and the Great Falling Away underway, we need to lean into Holy Ghost discernment now more than ever.

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If the Holy Spirit lives on the inside of you—and if you are saved He does—you have access to the discernment as a partaker

of Christ's divine nature. All believers can tap into all things pertaining to life and godliness, including Holy Ghost discernment. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would lead us and guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Beyond the supernatural gift of discerning of spirits, even unbelievers can walk in some measure of discernment—how much more a child of God who is filled with the Holy Ghost and prays in tongues? At its most basic level, discerning simply means to show insight and understanding. Some have a discerning eye for art. Others have a discerning palate for food. We need to develop a discerning spirit that safeguards us from deception in this hour.

Discerning God's Spirit

With that said, I've discerned two troubling ditches in the church world. In one ditch you have those who always see a devil behind every doorknob. They see devils where there are no devils and make false accusations based on soulish imaginations and presumption. Presumption in the Bible usually leads to death—and presumption kills discernment.

In the other ditch are those who cannot discern any spirits in their midst, even the Spirit of God. Oh, I forgot those who believe evil spirits talking to them are God and think God speaking to them is an evil spirit. Those in this ditch don't rightly discern Jesus. We see this in Matthew 14. Jesus commanded His disciples to get into a boat and go ahead of Him to the other side.

"During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a spirit.' And they cried out in fear" (Matt. 14:25-26). Some translations say, "it is a ghost." Later, we see two disciples going to a village called Emmaus. Jesus showed up on the scene and started walking with them, but they didn't discern it was the

risen Christ (Luke 24).

How Do We Develop Discernment?

Even if you don't operate in the gift of discerning of spirits, you can still develop discernment. The Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). So if you stay in the Word, your discernment will grow.

We can also practice discernment, asking those more experienced or mature to judge our discerning. The writer of Hebrews said, "Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a baby. But solid food belongs to those who are mature, for those who through practice have powers of discernment that are trained to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:13-14).

Walking in love will help you keep a discerning heart. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul prayed that their love would abound more and more, with all knowledge and discernment, so that they could approve what is excellent (Phil. 1:9-10). When we walk in love, we are walking close to God and we will grow in discernment. This should be a prayer we all pray for ourselves and those we run with.

The Bible warns over and over and over again not to be deceived. In fact, the Bible commands us not to be deceived. Jesus prophesied false prophets and false christs would rise and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24). It's possible for any of us to be deceived but if we ask God for discernment, if we stay prayerful, if we walk in love, if we are students of the Word and if we practice discernment, we can be among the truth bearers in our generation who help set the captives free.