

The Witness of the Holy Spirit

✖ If you've ever read any written accounts of true revivals in past ages, you know about the powerful ways in which God moved upon the people, both inside and outside the church. But you may not be aware that when these powerful manifestations of God took place, many other things—things that were not of God—came in also. Strong fleshly shows and demonic take-offs tried to discredit the move. Without the discernment present to separate the precious from the vile, there was a kind of chaos.

When the power of God descends upon a group of people, there is always a form of disorder because God disrupts our religious programs, traditions and customs. But if there is no discernment among the people, particularly the leaders of the movement, the disorder may have a different origin. It is crucial that we rely on the Holy Spirit within us to bear witness to the truth.

Let's face it. Discerning evil would be easy if the devil appeared, looking just like the devil we imagined when we were kids, and said: "Hi, I'm the devil! I've come to torment you and destroy your church." Unfortunately, he doesn't make our job that easy. The Bible says he can appear as an angel of light.

Surprisingly, a religious spirit does not always have a legalistic, sour-faced look. I've seen religious spirits operating in people who appear very friendly, "free," spontaneous—even spiritual. A religious spirit can spend hours telling you about dreams and visions and "prophetic words from the Lord."

But God has made provision for us to discern between good and

evil—by sending His Spirit, who guides us and leads us into all truth (John 16:13), to dwell within us. It is His responsibility to “deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13).

What is the problem then? Why do churches and individuals find out too late that what they thought was God was really a fake?

I believe it is because we, as humans, are basically lazy. We would rather accept something at face value than make the effort to tune into the Holy Spirit and receive His discernment. It is not only the work of listening we shy away from—but the responsibility of taking action if we discern that something is awry.

Listening to the Holy Spirit

I walked past a small group of people who were gathered in my kitchen. They were standing around a first-time guest, who had come, as many other visitors did, to “check us out” and see for himself the manifestations of the presence of God that were occurring in our meetings.

As I went by, I overheard the newcomer telling how he had lost his wages on the way home from work (in those days many manual workers were paid weekly, in cash). Two thoughts crossed my mind: First, They are going to give him some money to make up for the loss, and second, He’s lying!

I walked away and began to silently rebuke myself: You are so suspicious! But inwardly my heart still felt uneasy.

The following week the same visitor came again to the house meeting. One of the elders from another church in our town also attended. After the service, the elder called me aside into another room. He was hesitant but finally said, “I need to tell you something about a man who was here tonight.”

He described our visitor. “The man has made a habit of going to various churches and telling the people he has lost his

wages so that they take up offerings for him,” the elder told me. “But in actual fact, he spends his money in the betting shop!”

I thanked the elder and then went straight out into my yard and sat down. I felt that God and I needed to have a talk. “God, I’m sorry. I believe you tried to tell me about this, and I ignored your Spirit and pushed His voice aside.”

Immediately the Holy Spirit gave me a striking vision. I saw a picture of a gigantic fir tree. It was lush and beautiful, with branches spreading out like a huge crinoline petticoat. The overall effect was impressive.

Then I saw that little ornaments had been stuck on the ends of the branches. The tree no longer looked impressive; the branches were so huge and the ornaments so small that it took on a pathetic appearance.

The Lord spoke to me, “Kathie, that’s what you do to my Spirit with all your little niceties and politenesses—they are not truth, and they are not of my Spirit. My truth does not need to be decorated with your niceties.”

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of truth and reality. He does not enter into pretense. He does not put on an act or witness to a lie. If you are born again that same Holy Spirit is in you. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth.

How? He witnesses to the truth. We have to learn to listen to the witness of the Spirit within us. It is the only way to walk in the truth of God and consequently live in the Spirit.

Jesus died on the cross not only so that we would have eternal security, but also so that we would be able to live in the realm He lived in—the realm of the Spirit. One of the keys to walking in this spiritual place is learning to listen to and obey the voice and witness of the Spirit within us.

Jesus did not make judgments and assessments according to what He saw with His eyes or heard with His ears. He was led by the Holy Spirit and listened to the voice of His Father (John 5:30; 7:24; 12:49). As He was, so are we in this world.

Exercising the Gifts of the Spirit

Why are we so insecure about being Spirit-led? Why do we not have the confidence that we should have? Most of us do not give attention to the witness of the Spirit when He is telling us something. We do not practice hearing and responding to the extent that we can be certain we recognize the voice of God.

Being able to exercise our spiritual senses to discern good and evil is a sign of maturity—a sign that we no longer need “milk” but are ready for “solid food” (see Heb. 5:12-14). But to get to the point of maturity, we must use our spiritual abilities regularly. The gifts of the Spirit—prophecy, the discerning of spirits and so on—are meant to be practiced!

Often we want to be able to operate in the gifts and functions of the Holy Spirit without having to exercise them. Why? Because exercising them requires us to get into faith—and it’s an effort to do that. It’s much easier to simply receive whatever is said rather than making the effort to listen to the Spirit within us, especially if He’s saying something different from what we are hearing with our (natural) ears.

Do you realize that we have a responsibility to discern not only between good and evil but also between that which is good and that which is God? If someone comes and quotes a Scripture to you, listen for the witness of the Spirit. The verse may be true, but it may not necessarily be the thing God is speaking to you right now.

I have some friends in Georgia who love the mission field. However, the Lord brought them back for a period of time in order to get some things sorted out within their own family.

During this time, someone came along and gave them a conflicting word, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." That threw them into confusion for a couple of weeks.

Fortunately they had good discernment and felt that although the second word was scriptural, it wasn't a word from God for them at that particular time. The second word was well-meaning, but it came from someone's soul and not from the Spirit of God.

God said to me once, "Kathie, things are not as they appear." This is why we are not to judge by what we see! Jesus learned not to judge by the seeing of the eye nor the hearing of the ear, and we are supposed to walk the same way.

The desert fathers learned to do this. These were men who secluded themselves in the caves in Egypt during the second century in order to pray unhindered by worldly distractions. One of them, a man named Anthony, was a seasoned prayer warrior who had clear discernment.

Anthony tells a story about a two-week period when the devil tried to stop him from praying. At first the devil came undisguised to the door of his cave.

"What do you want?" Anthony asked.

"Why don't you leave me alone?" the devil said. "Why do you Christians keep praying? You are tormenting me, and it is not my time."

Anthony sent him packing. A few days later the devil came as a wild beast and tried to kill him. Anthony discerned it was Satan and rebuked him. The beast disappeared.

After a few more days Satan came as a preacher with a Bible. Anthony discerned he was not from God. Finally the devil showed up as a group of psalmists, singing psalms. "This

time," wrote Anthony, "...I cursed them, and they disappeared in the desert."

How many Christians today have this kind of discernment? Yet Anthony and the other desert fathers lived in a spiritual realm that is available to us all. In fact, we too are meant to live in it! The same Holy Spirit who dwelled in them now dwells in us.

I believe God wants to awaken us to our need for discernment so that when He begins to move, we can thwart the enemy's plans to pull down what God is building. We can be on the lookout for his tactics rather than seeing too late what we would have seen in the beginning if we had had our senses exercised.

We have all missed it here and there, but we can learn from our lack of faith and decide to walk in the discernment God has provided for us through His Holy Spirit. Let's learn to listen to Him and look to Him to guide us into all truth.

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