

Was it God or the Devil?

Discerning Satanic Hindrances

I'll admit it. There have been times when I thought the devil was in my way and it was really the **Holy Spirit** preventing me. There were other times when I thought the Holy Spirit was opening the door and it was really the devil tapping into the idolatry in my own heart to set me up for a mess.

I've grown up quite a lot in Christ since then, but we are all prone to miss it from time to time. Understanding how the Holy Spirit leads and how the devil deceives can help you follow the steps the Lord has ordered for you instead of falling into the roaring lion's trap.

We can take a lesson from the apostle Paul, who keenly observed the difference between his own plans, the Holy Spirit's plans and the devil's plans.

Paul's Bright Idea

Paul was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and he got about his Father's business with as much zeal as he formerly displayed in **persecuting** the church. Paul traveled the world over in his day, but when he and his **apostolic** team went through certain cities to preach the Word the Holy Spirit stopped him in favor of a more strategic mission. In Acts 16: 6-10, Luke records:

"Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to

Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Paul concluded that the Lord wanted him to preach the gospel in Macedonia only after the **Holy Spirit** twice prevented him from preaching in other cities, then gave him a vision that clearly laid out the next leg of his missionary journey. In other words, Paul had his plans but the **Holy Spirit** had a different plan. Paul could have mistakenly blamed the devil for the obstacles to getting the gospel out in Phrygia and the region of Galatia and Bithynia, but he discerned it was the Holy Spirit—not the devil—preventing him from fulfilling his mission.

The story was altogether different in Paul’s endeavors to visit the church at Thessalonica. Paul writes, “Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us” (1 Thess. 2:18). We don’t know exactly how Paul determined it was Satan hindering him rather than the Holy Spirit preventing him or what Satan may have done to hinder him. But Paul was certain the devil was to blame.

Discerning Satanic Hindrances

Sometimes it’s obvious that the Holy Spirit is preventing you or that the devil is thwarting you. But sometimes it’s not so obvious. So how do you tell the difference?

1. Ask the Holy Spirit what is going on. First of all we need to pray and ask the Lord what is going on. When in doubt, our best first move is to trust in the Lord and not on our own understanding. Just because we’ve seen a pattern in how the Holy Ghost moves or how Satan works doesn’t mean we can automatically presume who’s behind something. That said, there are some discernable demonic hints. For example ...

2. Did God already tell you to do it? If you are convinced that the **Holy Spirit** expressly told you to do something and you are meeting with obstacles, it’s likely the enemy trying

to prevent fruit for the Kingdom. Satan constantly works to hinder God's plan, even though he is already defeated.

3. What is the objective of the hindrance? Any hindrance that keeps you from getting closer to God is not from God. Satan will set up idols in our lives hoping we'll go after the promotion, the money, the entertainment, the fame or the something else. Of course, he uses our own flesh and soulish desires to distract us. You can't really blame the devil.

4. What's going through your mind? The Word says we should think on good things. If the hindrance you face is coming in the form of unpleasant thoughts and fearful imaginations, that's not God speaking to you. That's the devil's way to get you into fear, doubt and unbelief.

Remember, we are not wrestling against flesh and blood—but we are wrestling. The key is to wrestle with the enemy and not with God. In other words, we don't want to be resisting God when we should be resisting the enemy and we don't want to be cooperating with the enemy when we should be cooperating with God. The enemy is walking around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. God's eyes roam to and for over the earth in order to strengthen the ones whose hearts are fully committed to him (see 2 Chron. 16:9).

The bottom line—do what Paul did: “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5) No devil in hell can keep you from God's will if you are sold out to His plan. Amen.

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