

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12.
2. We are looking this morning at the gift on gifts...the gift of discernment.
3. In the words of 1 Corinthians 12:10, it says, "and to another the distinguishing of spirits."
4. Since there are teachers, preachers, and evangelists in the church, the gift of discernment is a much needed gift.
5. But not only is it needed to evaluate those who preach and teach, it is also needed to evaluate believers as they seek to minister their gifts to the body of Christ in the power of the Spirit.
6. In every era of history, there has always been the need for discernment among God's people.
7. God told Israel in Deuteronomy 18:22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."
8. Verse 20 says, "that prophet shall die."
9. In order for Israel to evaluate the prophets, the gift of discernment was needed.
10. In the early church, "signs and wonders and mighty deeds" were the "signs of an apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

11. In order to evaluate a true apostle, the gift of discernment was needed.
12. Paul prayed for the church to have discernment in Philippians 1:9-10, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."
13. The writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 5:13-14, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."
14. Satan is an artist at disguises.
15. For every good thing God provides, Satan produces a counterfeit.
16. Where there is Christ, there is Antichrist.
17. Where there are prophets, there are false prophets.
18. Where there is gospel, there are false gospels.
19. The person with the gift of discerning the spirits has an uncanny ability to detect the ring of reality.
20. He can spot a phony, he can sift wheat, and he can "smell a rat."
21. All truth sets itself against error.
22. Where Scripture speaks, it speaks with authority.
23. It speaks definitively. It speaks decisively. It calls for absolute conviction.

24. It demands that we submit to God and resist the devil (Jas.4:7).
25. It urges us to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).
26. It commands us to turn away from evil and do good (1 Peter 3:11).
27. It calls us to reject the broad way that seems right to the human mind (Prov. 14:12; 16:25) and follow the narrow way prescribed by God (Matt. 7:13-14).
28. It tells us that our ways are not God's ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts (Isa. 55:8).
29. It orders us to protect the truth and reject lies (Rom. 1:25).
30. It declares that no lie is of the truth (1 John 2:21).
31. It guarantees that the righteous shall be blessed and the wicked perish (Ps. 1:1, 6).
32. And it reminds us that "friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (James 4:4).
33. Discernment demands that where Scripture speaks with clarity, a hard line must be drawn.
34. The line of distinction between truth and error, wisdom and foolishness, and church and world are being obliterated.
35. The truth is that far more things are black-and-white issues than most people realize.
36. Most of the truths of God's Word are explicitly contrasted with opposing ideas.

37. Jay Adams calls this the principle of antithesis, and he points out that it is fundamental to genuine discernment.
38. He writes, "In the Bible, where antithesis is so important, discernment-the ability to distinguish God's thoughts and God's ways from all others-is essential. Indeed, God says that "the wise in heart will be called discerning" (Proverbs 16:21). From the Garden of Eden with its two trees (one allowed, one forbidden) to the eternal destiny of the human being in heaven or in hell, the Bible sets forth two, and only two, ways: God's way, and all others. Accordingly, people are said to be saved or lost. They belong to God's people or the world. There was Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and Ebal, the mount of cursing. There is the narrow way and the wide way, leading either to eternal life or to destruction. There are those who are against and those who are with us, those within and those without. There is life and death, truth and falsehood, good and bad, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, love and hatred, spiritual wisdom and the wisdom of the world. Christ is said to be the way, the truth, and the life, and no one may come to the Father but by Him. His is the only name under the sky by which one may be saved."

LESSON

I. The Meaning of Discerning

1. The Greek word for "discernment" is diakrisis, which is "a distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging" (W.E. Vine).
2. The root word diakrino (verb) (discern) means. "to judge through, to see through to the truth, to evaluate something" (John MacArthur, Spiritual Gifts, p.150).
3. It is "the ability to see through people: (Harry Ironside, 1 Corinthians, p.385).
4. John Calvin said, "This special judgment was used, not simply to prevent their being deceived by the lying faces or false airs, but rather to enable them to make out the difference between the true minister and the false, as if they had marks to distinguish them" (1 Corinthians, p.263).

5. So, the distinguishing of spirits is "simply to evaluate the spirit--whether it is God or a spirit other than the Holy Spirit" (John MacArthur, *Spiritual Gifts*, p.150).
6. In other words, "A person with this gift has special ability to discern if a man is an imposter" or not. (MacDonald, William. [*Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*](#). Ed. Arthur Farstad. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995. Print.)

II. The Purpose of the Gift of Discernment

5 reasons why we need this gift today:

1. To Protect the Church from False Teaching

1. Acts 20:28-31, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."
2. Matthew 7:15-16, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"
3. 1 John 2:18-26
4. A false believer or teacher:
 1. Abandons the faith (v.19)

2. Denies Jesus is the Messiah (v.22)

3. Denies the Father (v.22)

4. They pervert the truth (vv.24-25)

5. 1 John 2:18-26

6. 1 John 4:1-3

2. To Recognize the Satanic Counterfeit

1. Paul needed discernment to recognize the demon spirit

1. Acts 16:16-18, "It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment."

2. The church at Ephesus tested those who claimed to be apostles. In Revelation 2:2, "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test (peirazo, scrutinize, examine, prove, try) those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false."

3. To Recognize a Lying Spirit (Acts 5:1-10)

4. To Recognize Impure Motives

1. Acts 8:5-23 (Simon the sorcerer)

2. 1 Corinthians 11:29, "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly."

5. To Recognize An Erring Brother

1. Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

2. James 5:19-20, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

3. Jude 1:22-23, "And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

III. The People Who Possessed the Gift of Discernment

1. Jesus (Matthew 15:1-9)

2. The Apostles (Acts 5:1-10)

3. The Apostles' Associates

1. Acts 7:51-53, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

4. The Seventy

1. Luke 10:17, "The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."
2. Luke 10:19, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you."

5. The Apostle Paul

1. Acts 16:16-18, "It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment."

6. Believer's Today

1. Some argue that this gift is no longer needed because you can always recognize a counterfeit by comparing that person with Scripture.
2. But I think that is difficult to determine when there is no place in the Scripture that says the gift of discernment has ceased.
3. It is best to allow the gift to shift and change through the flow of the history of the church, so that it can serve any period of history.
4. Today it is just as important to protect the church from impure doctrine as it ever was.
5. Only now the style of operation of the gift is different (John MacArthur, Spiritual Gifts, p.152).

6. Philippians 1:9-10, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."
7. 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."
8. Some books that are good for discernment of doctrine is "The Agony of Deceit" (Horton), "Christianity in Crisis" (Hanegraaff), "The Kingdom of the Cults" (Martin).

CONCLUSION

1. All Christians are to be discerning but there are some who specifically have this gift in the body of Christ.
2. We need this gift today.
3. A person with the gift of discernment can discriminate between that which is raised up by God and that which pretends to be. He has the ability to unmask Satan's trickery, to detect false teachings, and to ferret out false teachers.
4. He has the ability to spot a phony before others see through his phoniness.
5. A person with this gift can read a religious book and almost immediately detect any subtle error.
6. He can hear a sermon and put his finger on any deficiency of truth.
7. He can listen to some new cultic teaching with its mixture of truth and error and not be taken in, but soon sense the area of aberration.

8. He can tell whether the atmosphere in a service is mere emotion, or emotion based on biblical truth. (Flynn, Leslie B. [*19 Gifts of the Spirit*](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012. Print.)
9. But the best discernment you can have right now is whether you a Christian or not.
10. There are so many who believe they're saved and going to heaven but the reality is they are on the broad road that leads to destruction.
11. So pray for discernment right now in making sure you're truly saved.
12. And don't base it on a prayer you prayed at one time or baptism or church membership.
13. Base it on a transformed life that came as a result of surrendering your life to Christ.
14. You can be saved right now by believing in your heart that Christ died for you, for your sin and believing on Him who was raised from the dead will save you.
15. Call on Him now as we pray.
16. Let's pray.