

Spiritual Gifts Series

Key verse:
1 Corinthians 12:10

25th June 2006

Session 6: The Gift of
Distinguishing between spirits

Speaker: Adam Voke

Greek = 'Diakriseis'. 'Dia' = 'through'. 'Krisis' = 'judgement'

Mark Stibbe: *'The gift of discernment is.....the special ability to judge, evaluate and perceive something in the 'spiritual' realm'*

Why do we need to discern or distinguish or perceive something in this way?

1. We live in a spiritual creation

The reality is we live in a spiritual creation, there is more than just the natural that we see. Jesus taught that *'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth'*(John 4:24)

Eph 6:12 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms'

Graham Cooke: *'People who get hung up on the accuracy and content before weighing the spirit of the word are liable to make huge mistakes. We need to do both' – the spirit behind things is important.*

Acts 16:16-18 – A slave girl who was demonised but proclaimed accurately 'These men are bond servants of the most high God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation'

In speaking about God's word: *Heb 5:14 '...solid food is for the mature who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil'* – All must and can exercise a measure of discernment through the word and prayer.

But this gift is something more than that. – A supernatural endowment of discernment.

2. We are surrounded by spiritual beings

Spirit = Greek: *'pneuma'*

Mark Stibbe: *'The special ability to discern whether the human spirit, the Holy Spirit or a supernatural spirit (good or bad) is at work behind a particular phenomenon'*

Word is used 379 in the New Testament. It has three different uses:

1. The human spirit – psycho – spiritual

Acts 18:25 - 'Apollos says he was 'burning in spirit' Rom 12:11 'keep your spiritual fervour' – both of these refer to the **inner spiritual** part of a person.

1 Cor 4:21 – Paul wrote about coming to the Corinthians with a 'spirit of meekness' – referring to a **psychological and emotional disposition**.

Nathaniel referred to by Jesus as *'a man in whom there is no deceit'* – John 1:47

How did he know? *'Jesus knew what was in a man'* – John 2:25

2. The Holy Spirit

1 Cor 12:4 'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit'

3. Angelic and Demonic spirits

Heb 1:14 'Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation'

Discerning of angelic beings also found in scripture – Elisha sees the angelic army around him. 2 Kings 6:16-17.

Mark 1:27 'The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him"'

Jesus said to Peter: Matt 16:23 'Get behind me Satan'

A Caution in discernment:

In response to a boy with seizures: Matt 17:14-18 – 'Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of the boy and he was healed from that moment'

Matt 4:24 – 'people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them' – distinction between seizures and demonisation.

Wayne Grudem: 'In addition to.....outward indications of demonic influence, there is probably also a more subjective perception that occurs at the spiritual and emotional level, whereby the presence of demonic activity is distinguished. When this is highly developed, and is able to function for the benefit of the church as a whole, then Paul would no doubt call it a gift of distinguishing between spirits'

3. We worship in a spiritual community

We must not forget the main context for this gift - The gathered church community

Rod Williams 'People who gather in the fellowship represent a wide spiritual range. Some may be present with a heavy spirit or an anxious spirit; there maybe a weak spirit or a proud spirit; some may come with a jealous spirit or a bitter spirit. Such spirits may not be apparent to others; indeed, the believers may not be fully aware of them among themselves. Yet such spiritual attitudes are likely to affect whatever happens in the dynamics of interrelationships. Hence, the gift of discernings of spirits can be of signal importance, for by a supernatural action – that of the Holy Spirit – the spirits of people are disclosed. When this occurs, the area of need may become apparent and proper ministry rendered'

It is especially important when it comes to prophesy, many scholars pair the gift of discernment of spirits with prophecy.

1 Cor 14:29 'two or three prophets should speak and the others should **weigh** carefully what is said'

'Weigh' = Greek – 'diakrinein' which is the verb of the noun used for the spiritual gift of discernment in 1 Cor 12:9.

Guidelines adapted from Mark Stibbe on **Criteria for discernment:**

a. The test of conviction

David Pytches: 'In the world of painting and antiques there is a gift called 'jizz' which instinctively conveys instant recognition of the indefinable. The gift of discernment operates in a similar way through the Spirit. It is transrational.'

b. The test of community

A number of people are to weight the prophesy and not just the leader – 1 Cor 14:29.

Scripture speaks about the testimony of two witnesses being valid, this is wise counsel for this gift. The community should witness to the Holy Spirit's activity.

c. The test of consistency

1. In line with the character of Christ 2. In line with scripture 3. Some precedent or comment from church history

d. The test of Christology

At the beginning of the teaching on spiritual gifts Paul writes that only by the Spirit of Christ can a person say 'Jesus is Lord' – 1 Cor 12:3. It is this Holy Spirit that gives the gifts – verse 4.

Walter Hilton (14th Century Christian): Anything that weakens this desire for Jesus Christ and draws the soul away from concentrating on Jesus Christ is loosening the bonds between the soul and Jesus. Therefore this must come from the enemy and not from God. But if a spirit, a revelation, or a feeling makes a soul desire Jesus more strongly, quickly binding the soul to Jesus more firmly in love.....then you will know that this spirit is from God'

e. The test of character

1 Cor 13 is the motivation and manner of serving one another with spiritual gifts. Is there a loving atmosphere promoted, is the delivery of the prophesy in a loving way?

f. The test of consequence

Matt 7:20 'By their fruit you will know them' – there will be a production of good fruit in some way. This may take time to see and observe. It will build up and strengthen etc.

Questions to ask on the spot if you can:

1. Is this your gut reaction that this is 'of the Lord'?
2. Are others witnessing that this is the Holy Spirit?
3. Is it consistent with the character of Jesus as revealed in scripture?
4. Is it consistent with the Word of God and with orthodox Christian doctrine?
5. Is this something which we've seen before and judged as authentic?
6. Does it draw attention to the Lord Jesus or to someone or something else?
7. Is it frenzied, uncontrolled and disorderly?
8. Is it done/uttered in a loving manner?
9. What kind of fruit do you envisage from it?
10. Is this something 'for the common good'?