

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit...discerning of spirits... (I Corinthians 12:7-10)

Discerning of spirits is the ability to evaluate people, doctrines, and situations as to whether they are of God or of Satan. In no way should discerning of spirits be confused with a critical spirit. The gift is a spiritual gift. Spiritual things are not discerned with the natural mind:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (I Corinthians 2:15)

This gift is limited to the discerning of spirits. It is not just discerning in general. This gift serves the church by identifying people who would split the fellowship with wrong motives, doctrines, and attitudes.

Discerning of spirits is an important gift because the enemies against which we fight are not visible to the human eye. They are recognized only through spiritual discernment:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

One of the strategies used by Satan is deception. This is why discernment is so important:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (II Corinthians 11:14-15)

As we near the return of the Lord Jesus, these spirits of deception will increase:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. (I Timothy 4:1)

The Apostle Peter warned:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (II Peter 2:1-2)

If you do not have the gift of discerning of spirits you are not left defenseless. God has given a way to test the spirits. This test is valid whether or not you have the gift of discernment:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God;

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (I John 4:1-3)

You can learn to use your spiritual senses to discern between good and evil. These spiritual senses are developed by study of God's Word:

For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

The following references are examples of use of the gift of discerning of spirits:

-Jesus: Matthew 16:21-23; John 1:47; Luke 9:55

-Paul: Acts 13:6-12; 16:16-18

-Peter: Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-24

(In Acts 8:18-24, what is one intended result of the use of the gift of discerning of spirits?)

