

Dream Again

Introduction: Series overview

Series Introduction

How do you know when something is from God? How can you be sure when God leads you to do something that seems crazy? How do you know when something that sounds spiritual is evil? How can you make sure that you are not deceived?

We are going to explore today the gift of the discernment of spirits. Notice two things here. There is no gift of discernment. The gift is the discernment of Spirits. Also notice that it is not the discernment of demonic spirit....although that is included. It is the Discerning of Spirits...plural.

The Holy Spirit gifts us at times to know if something is from God or not. How can you be sure that God is asking you to do something that seems illogical? God gives us the answer.

There have been times in my life where I have known for sure that something was demonic. Often before I knew anything about it. I have also had times when I have known that something was clearly from God.

And, in the times when I have had doubts, others have affirmed or denied what God was doing through the Gift of Discerning of Spirits.

1 Corinthians 12:6–11 (ESV) 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Now this is not an exhaustive list. There are other gifts like hospitality, teaching, helps, giving, administration and others. We have just focused on the gifts Paul mentions to the Corinthians. You may wonder why I chose to do this....the reason is that Paul chose to mention these to the church in Corinth and that church is very similar to the American church today. These are the Spiritual Gifts that we need to navigate the times.

When it comes to the gift of discerning spirits, every born-again believer has a certain amount of discernment, which increases as the believer matures in the Spirit.

Hebrews 5:12–14 (ESV) 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The maturing believer is empowered by the Spirit of God through the Scriptures to tell the difference between good and evil, and, beyond that, he can also distinguish between what is good and what is better. In other words, any born-again believer who chooses to focus on the Word of God is spiritually discerning.

We are all exhorted to be spiritually discerning

Acts 17:10–11 (ESV) 10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

1 John 4:1–6 (ESV) 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 Corinthians 12:1–3 (ESV) 1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

There are certain believers, however, who have the spiritual gift of discerning spirits—that is, the God-given ability to distinguish between the truth of the Word and the deceptive doctrines propagated by demons.

Some in the body of Christ have been given the unique ability to spot the doctrinal “forgeries” that have plagued the church since the first century. This discernment does not involve mystical, extra-biblical revelations or a voice from God. Rather, the spiritually discerning are so familiar with the Word of God that they instantly recognize what is contrary to it.

They do not receive special messages from God; they use the Word of God to “test the spirits” to see which line up with God and which are in opposition to Him. The spiritually discerning are diligent to “rightly divide” the Word of God.

2 Timothy 2:14–19 (ESV) 14 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19 But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Note that Paul not only warns Timothy to rightly handle the word of truth, but He also goes on to call out and name people who are demonically trying to mislead the believers. Now remember that those who come to deceive the church....look really spiritual. They don't come with pitchforks, horns and fire....they come with a Bible, false humility, and critique of those God has placed in leadership. They are there to undermine the leadership structure of the church.

So Paul calls them out. Specifically. Directly and without hesitation. It is very likely that when Paul's letter was written to Timothy, it was read out loud to these imposters. The church in my opinion needs a lot more of this kind of expression of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the most challenging things for leaders who have the Spiritual Gift of Discernment of Spirits. Convincing people who are hearing what their itchy ears want to hear, from someone with a lot of charisma, and someone who appears spiritual....that what they are seeing is demonic. Satan does not dress as evil....He dresses as a follower. We must know that.

1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 (ESV) 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

It can be very difficult for even mature believers to recognize those from Satan within the Church who are very good at deception.

Acts 20:28–32 (ESV) 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul is on his way back to Jerusalem to bring money to the believers being persecuted there. But on the way back he stops at Ephesus, his home church, and tells the Elders two things that are critically important.

First the Holy Spirit is leading him to Jerusalem and he knows that things will not go well for him there. The Spirit has revealed this to him....but he must go. Thus the Elders at Ephesus will likely never see him again on earth.

Acts 20:36–38 (ESV) 36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Now Paul went out of his way to stop by Ephesus. A church he had pastored for many years. Yes, he stopped to pray with the Elders and tell them goodbye, but....it was the message he delivered to them that tells us Paul's greatest concern and threat to his church.

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Paul is commending them....leaving them to God. He can't lead them anymore. His time is coming to an end. He is soon going to be imprisoned and killed in Rome. But he tells them....I know they are coming....from within....be alert!

I commend you to God and the Word of His grace. That is Jesus. Note this....which is able to build you up....That is the work of the Spirit. Some will be empowered with the Spiritual Gifts that help to protect the church from imposters.

Jesus said one of my favorite lines in Scripture, but you never see it on a bumper sticker.

Matthew 24:24–28 (ESV) 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

I remember watching an imposter at my church and I turned to one of our elders and told them...."Corpse and vultures" and yet this elder missed it. This imposter had led astray even the elect. The discernment of the Spirits is a critical protective covering that the Holy Spirit gives the church and I believe those God has called to lead the church.

So it is imperative that all believers as they mature learn how to Test the Spirits to see if they are from God. The majority of church attenders do not know the Scriptures well enough to recognize false teaching.

Several years ago a large church in our community denounced Jesus....Said he was not God...never really walked on earth or went to the cross to pay for our sins....they then announced that they would no longer celebrate communion or baptism. They believed that the Bible was a history book with errors and they wanted to welcome all who embraced new ways of looking at God.

You could not denounce Jesus any more clearly or insistently than they did....from the pulpit...and in written form. Believers should have left in masses...they should have torn their clothes...dumped dust on their heads...called out their leaders in shame...and protected their church from apostasy. And yet, this church did not significantly diminish in attendance...their lead "pastor" stayed....and they are still calling themselves a Christian church. Worse they are teaching this heresy to children and the next generation.

I meet people who attend there. I often ask them what their church believes about Jesus....and they have no idea. Its not important to them. They stay there because their family has fun and enjoys the events. If you go to church for the events and fun....any theology will work. They and many churches just like them....proved it. The church in our community was called out by essentially every church leader and church in the community and very few it seems heeded the warning.

itchy ears....immature followers...weak spiritual leadership....ignoring discernment....but claiming to follow Jesus....this is exactly the church that Satan builds....exactly the church that Paul warned about...and exactly the church that is taking over American faith.

So Jesus....Paul....John...they all warned us and told us to test the spirits...test everything.....Test what you see on TV...test what you hear on the radio...test what Pastor Frank says....test what every Pastor teaches.....All believer are instructed to test everything. Some also have the Spiritual Gift of Discerning of Spirits.

Remember that the Spiritual Gifts are given out to whomever the Spirit decides. Some with the gift of Discernment of Spirits may be very immature in their walk with Christ. It is one of the ways God protects His Spiritual children.

So you may face a circumstance were God Himself just reveals to you....something that you may never know on your own...some truth imparted to you from God that aligns with Scripture and reveals that what you are seeing is demonic or not.

Now notice that I said demonic or not. Often you will hear someone with the Gift of Discernment of Spirits recognize that a teaching is not from God. But discernment of Spirits works both ways. You discern Spirits...plural. Yes there are many demonic spirits out there....but there is also the Holy Spirit.

Those given this gift...recognize...and don't miss this...both. They have knowledge from God of what is demonic...but they also have knowledge from God what is from the Holy Spirit.

Remember that many times, the Holy Spirit lead us to do things that make no sense. It is not logical. It is not the norm. It may be dangerous.. It may be expensive...it may turn people away....but those with this Gift...recognize what is from God as well.

I have had as one of my mentors Tommy Barnett...a well known pastor in Phoenix...He is one of the most humble men I have known. One day He heard from God that he was to build a homeless ministry in downtown Los Angeles. He could shake this dream or desire God had given him to do something about the homeless in LA.

He validated that message with Scripture and had many of his elders and leaders pray. God spoke through that group and God gave several the gift of discernment to reveal to Tommy that this task came from God.

It made no sense. He was the Pastor of a large church in Phoenix. Knew almost no one in LA and did not feel called to leave his home church. But one thing about Tommy is that once he has heard from God he is unwavering. He went to LA and found an abandoned hospital...actually the size of SMH....and it was a flop house, a drug addict's hangout...and home to many who hid there. But God was already at work on this plan ten years earlier.

This hospital had been the largest in LA and was run by a faith based hospital system. That system was bought by a secular company, but this particular hospital had a deal breaker clause that it must always be used by a faith based organization or church.

So, when the buyout occurred this building had to be used by God's people or sit empty.....God had set aside this place for His purposes.

The building that was close to being condemned and torn down was worth nothing. But the land just off the 101 in LA was worth at least \$10 million dollars back then.

Tommy prayed and offered them \$2.7 million. The secular group laughed him out of the boardroom because they thought they were in charge. A few days later a nun called Tommy and told him they had accepted his offer.

That is when he dropped the next bomb....we don't have any money...not yet.

They gave him a deadline to close. Tommy went back to his church...and to his national TV audience and asked them to sponsor him while he walked every mile from Phoenix to this hospital.

About 750 miles. He had to have sponsors that totaled \$3600/mile. When he arrived in LA, on the day of closing....He bought this run down nearly condemned building in cash.

A few years later, I was asked to join them and help start their inner city homeless medical ministry. I was on the Board of City Help for several years.

Volunteers from all over the country...electricians, plumbers, concrete workers, elevator repair people, thousands drove there in RV's and stayed in order to bring this building up to code before each floor was condemned.

Today that dilapidated hospital is now beautifully up to code...I can't even really recognize it anymore....Tommy called it the Dream Center **photo**. A place where God's dream for many who supported him was filled....and a place where those who are down and out....can begin to dream again.

Today over 100 ministries of God call the Dream Center home. They have adopted a block, foster care intervention, residential programs, gang recovery, substance recovery, mobile food bank, clothing outreach, skid row ministries, church services, men and women's discipleship programs....under the bridge ministries...and yes...medical support as well.

You can read all about this incredible journey of faith in Matthew Barnett's book, "The Church that Never Sleeps"

That affirmation from God to Tommy and his leaders....the Gift of Discernment of Spirits that affirmed that his crazy, incredible, outlandish, perhaps foolish idea...really was from God. The Gift of discernment of Spirits will clearly identify things of Satan....but God also uses it...to clearly affirm...and stamp those things that are His.

That affirmation eventually led to Saline Soulution...a mobile medical ministry here in Sarasota...and the Remnant Cafe....Tammy and I after our experience in LA devoted our lives to building on what God is doing for the least of these...not just in LA...but in Sarasota.

We have sent many mission teams to the DreamCenter over the years so that people can see things that God has planned for those He loves that we could never imagine. When God begins the Supernatural it is hard for us to believe....that is why the Gift of Discernment of the Spirits is so important. When God has affirmed His will through this gift...what He has decided is already accomplished...but it will only be accomplished by those with enough faith to believe in that which seems impossible.

Tommy told me one day that most of us never see the Supernatural of God because we walk only in what our abilities and comfort zones allow.

He said that he had moments of serious doubt...He would look like a fool if this failed. God would look impotent if this failed...In his flesh everything said stop. But he was surrounded with other man and women who had in those moments the Spiritual Gift of Discernment of the Spirits. This dream was from God...it was a good as done...they just had to walk in faith with the Spirit.

When they had doubts or seemingly overwhelming obstacles, they went back to those early moments when God affirmed and stamped this project as His.

Tommy's example of faith has always inspired me. That inspiration keeps Tammy and I going in ministry. What God started at the Dream Center He continues here. It started as a medical unit under a tree in the park....grew to a mobile medical ministry in several locations....morphed into a Coffee Shop.... and then when God started Remnant....He did so...I believe...to open the Remnant Cafe.

We have been used by God to share our dream with hundreds of volunteers over the years. We have partnered with many churches and what started as a cookout in the parking lot once a week is now serving hundreds of meals, providing dozens of showers and giving away tons of clothes each and every day the cafe is open.

More importantly, our Saturday night church service is now our largest and fastest growing. We baptized last Saturday night and the gospel is being advanced...right here in this tiny church. Most of our volunteers in the Cafe come from other churches. A small percentage of our church serves there faithfully. I want to encourage you to Dream...to join what God is doing in the Remnant Cafe....Jesus told us to serve those less fortunate. Notice that the pronoun in this next verse is singular.

Matthew 25:34–40 (ESV) 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Jesus did not say.....You went to a church that served the needy.....or you supported a church that fed the homeless. I was thirsty and YOU....I was a stranger and YOU....I was hungry and YOU....I was naked and YOU...I was sick and YOU.....did this to me. Don't spend your Spiritual life sheltered in your comfort zone hoping others will do these things for you. Many leave this church because we tend to the least of these. We do what we believe Jesus would do. We want to be the church that show the love, compassion and mercy of Jesus to a lost world.

Tommy Barnett said that many never see the miracles of God in their lives because they are never willing to step out of their comfort zone. Many from other churches come here to serve the homeless. Many from our church come here but don't serve the homeless. Jesus said....you.....fed me, clothed me, served me.....how would YOU answer His question?

No real points for sitting on the sideline. Join what God is doing here. Get comfortable....being uncomfortable....Serve one day each month and I guarantee you....God will meet you there. The kind of spiritual life you dream for....is right outside your comfort zone....and that is where God is waiting for you.....You must get to the end of yourself...before you get to the beginning of the supernatural. Let's Pray.