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The Distinguishing of Spirits

12: 10c



Even in the Dispensation of Torah (see the commentary on [Exodus](#), to see link click [Da - The Dispensation of the Torah](#)), Isra'el had **false prophets** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Et - The False Prophet Hañaniah](#)), and **false teachers** (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Dk - A Prophet Like Moses](#)). The same has been true of the Church since its inception. Behind these **false prophets** and **teachers** are **demons** (see the commentary on [Jude Ah - Godless People Have Secretly Slipped in Among You](#)). So, it was valuable to have the ability to distinguish between **the Spirit of God** and **the demons of Satan**, especially in the early Church where the Scriptures were scarce.³⁷⁴ Thus, **ADONAI** provided an important **gift** for the protection of the Church: **the distinguishing of spirits**, or **the gift of discernment**.

The basic meaning of **discernment** is **the ability to distinguish truth from error or falsehood by judging whether the behavior or teaching is from God, Satan, human error or human power**. One might call it the supernatural ability to avoid being deceived. The Church needs those with **the gift of discernment** to warn believers in times of danger or keep them from being led astray by false teaching (also see **Acts 5:3-6, 16:16-18; First John 4:1**). **Satan** is the great deceiver, **the father of lies** (**John 8:44**), and ever since the Fall **he** and **his demons** have counterfeited the message of **ADONAI** and **His** work.

All believers should judge carefully what they hear and read and **not trust every spirit**. **On the contrary, test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false**

prophets have gone out into the world. Here is how you recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Yeshua Messiah came as a human being is from God, and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God - in fact, this is the spirit of the Anti-Messiah. You have heard he is coming. Well, he's here now, in the world already (First John 4:1-3). That is what the God-fearing and noble-minded Jews of Berea did when they first heard the gospel from Paul (Acts 17:11). They tested Paul's word against what they knew of God's Word, and because the two matched up, they believed that what he preached was from God and not from demons. That is what every believer should do with every message that claims to be from God. No preacher or teacher of the gospel should ever resent having what he or she says be judged against Scripture.

Dear Heavenly Father. Praise You, Father, for Your great wisdom! You knew that deceptive prophets would try to deceive Your children and so in Your lovingkindness, You provided the gift of discernment so Your children would know if the message is righteous or is a lie. Do not judge by appearance, but judge righteously (John 7:24). You enable those with this gift to ask for your wisdom if something is true or not. There are many gifts that you give Your children, but the greatest is the gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). We look forward to worshiping and praising you for all eternity! Love You always! In Yeshua's holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen

Those to whom God has given the gift of discernment have a special ability to recognize lying spirits - this gift is the Spirit's watchdog. Some ideas that are given as scriptural and on the surface seem scriptural actually are clever counterfeits that would deceive most believers. Those with the gift of discernment are the Ruach's inspectors, His counterfeit experts to whom He gives special insight and understanding. The gift was especially valuable in the Messianic Community (see the commentary on Acts At - Ananias and Sapphira Lie to the Ruach) because the B'rit Chadashah had not been completed. Because of the difficulty and expense of copying, for many years after its completion the Bible was not widely available. Believers with the gift of discernment were the Church's protectors.

The gift of discernment is also especially valuable when the Church and the gospel are considered acceptable in society. When the Church is persecuted, counterfeit teachers are usually scarce because the price for being identified with the gospel is too high. They are much more likely to appear in times and in places where the gospel is considered respectable or at least tolerated. In parts of the world today, evangelism is popular and often profitable. All sorts of teachers, preachers, writers, and counselors claim to be

evangelical and biblical. Although any thinking person realizes that all the ideas cannot be biblical, simply because many of them are so contradictory of each other, it is not always easy to know which are true and which are not. Most often they are a mixture. Counterfeit teachers used by **Satan** usually have some truth in what they say. Unfortunately, many basically sound teachers sometimes unknowingly pick up ideas from psychology, philosophy, or popular thinking that seem biblical but are not. It is the ministry of those with **discernment** to help separate the true from the false. Bank tellers are not trained how to recognize false currency. They are trained to recognize the real thing, so when they see false currency they recognize it immediately. Those with **discernment** are so **gifted**.

The Corinthian believers who had the gift were either not using it or were being ignored. Otherwise, the perverted ideas and practices that **Paul** deals with in this letter could not have flourished as they did. **Discernment** is **the gift**, along with **prophecy** (see **Cp - The Gift of Prophecy**), that **Paul** urged **the Corinthians** to use in relation to judging the use and **interpretation of tongues** (see **Dn - Order in Public Worship**). Those with **discernment** are to judge even those who **prophecy (14:29)**.

Even the phrase of “the gospel” can be deceitful and misleading. When **Paul** and **Silas** began to minister in **Philippi**, **Luke** reports that **once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16:16-17)**. What the girl said was not only true, but *seemed* to be favorable to the gospel and those who were proclaiming it. But the purpose and motivation of what she said was exactly the opposite. **The demons** who controlled her meant to attack the people, and gain their trust, then ridicule and undercut **God’s Word** and the work of **His** servants. In that case, **Paul** could not judge by what **she** was saying, because **the girl’s** words were true. **He** knew **she** was a **demonic** instrument only because **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh** revealed **the false spirit** that controlled **her**.

False teaching can be judged by comparing it with Scripture, but false spirits can be judged only by the true Spirit’s gift of discernment. That **gift** may be called **the Spirit’s gift of gifts**, because **God** uses it to reveal to **His** Church whether or not a display of the other **gifts** is of **Him**. All imitation of the gifts is not demonic. Much of it is simply the work of the flesh, carnal believers trying to serve **the Lord** in their own power and for their own benefit and glory. Summarizing, it can be said that **the gift of discernment** is given to tell if the other gifts are merely natural imitations, or if they are **demonic** counterfeits.

ADONAI empowers some of **His** children to unmask **false prophets, false teachers**, and carnal hypocrites. **He** gives **them** the spiritual insight to expose imitations and deceptions that most believers would take as genuine.³⁷⁵