



Discovering Your Design:

Preparing Christ's followers to change the world

DISCERNMENT

DEFINITION: THE SPIRIT-GIVEN ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TRUTH AND ERROR.

- Literally means to distinguish between spirits - it carries the idea of evaluating something carefully. Some believe it carries the idea of being able to distinguish between various types of evil spirits; like dumb or deaf spirit, etc. (see Grudem, 1083).
- This gift is closely linked with the gift of prophecy because one of the places it is needed is in the presence of the prophetic word - it primarily focuses on words that are spoken rather than "spirits" that are felt.
- Because of its proximity to prophecy, the distinguishing that takes place is over what is spoken more than what is not (i.e. motives, etc.). Every case in the New Testament uses this gift to evaluate what has been said. To be sure Annanias and Saphira's motives were off, nonetheless it was their words (their lie) which was held against them.
- This gift evaluates things on the basis of God's truth. (cf. Hebrews 5:14)
- This gift reminds us that we are engaged in a battle with the forces of evil, which are disguised as "angels of light." (cf. II Corinthians 11:14)

Biblical References: I Corinthians 12:10; I Corinthians 14:29 (verbal form); (I Thessalonians 5:20,21; I John 4:1-3; Matthew 16:21-23)

Contribution: this gift builds up the body by protecting the church from being led astray by evil, which comes through falsehood.

Biblical Examples: The churches at Corinth and Ephesus (I Corinthians 14:29, Revelation 2:2), Jesus with Peter (Matthew 26:21-23), Paul with Elymas (Acts 13:8-10).

Characteristics - People with this gift :

- carefully listen to what is said (or written), even notes what is left unsaid
- judge what is said on the basis of God's Word - these people have a biblical grid which helps them discern truth from falsehood
- think biblically
- are willing to speak out about falsehood for the sake of the body

Cautions:

- be careful of your "hunches" - stick to the Word of God as your objective standard
- be careful not to develop a negative, critical or unloving spirit as you discern truth from error
- exercise this gift with love, instruct with gentleness, pray for repentance, pray that they will "escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive". (cf. 2 Tim. 2: 25, 26)
- be careful that your gift of discernment doesn't prevent you from receiving the Word taught/preached

Christian Responsibility: Each of us is called to be discerning, to test the spirits to see whether they are from God (I John 4:1-3). We are to be as innocent as doves, yet shrewd as snakes. (Matthew 10:16)