

# A Church Alive: Gifts of the Spirit – How Do I Know?

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*Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit – I Corinthians 12:3*

## Last Week In Review

Last week we began to look at the Spiritual Gifts in particular. In doing so, we saw that the gifts are operated in a number of ways, for example, the number of ways Jesus healed people. This should give us confidence in how God works with us, just because it doesn't happen to look like the next person.

We also saw the gifts at Pentecost. Most people focus on tongues as related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit was doing many things at that time – there were words of knowledge, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy in addition to the tongues themselves, and you could probably make the case for faith and miracles as well. The key is that the Holy Spirit was moving to draw people closer to the Father.

## Paul's Challenge

Paul was dealing with a church that, on the one hand was very active, but on the other was very confused. They were confused over who to follow, what was right and wrong and over which spirits were operating in their midst. Similarly, we can get confused over knowing we are following God correctly, understanding our calling, and when the Holy Spirit is moving among us.

*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints – I Corinthians 14:31-33*

Paul was dealing with people who were more interested in the expression of the spirit, and not of the results of the expression. Because of this there was confusion not only in the order of the worship time – people speaking over each other, people speaking out of turn, people prophesying or giving random tongues without opportunity to clarify or validate them – but confusion in the doctrine as well. Paul needed the Corinthians to understand **how they could know** that they were actually moving in the right spirit. As we also understand how can move in the Spirit of God and not out of other influences out there, we have a greater opportunity to see His Spirit moving in effectiveness in our lives.

## The Three C's of Knowing

Through the scripture we can see a number of ways that we can know we are following God, but I would like to point out three:

- 1) **Consistency of the Message:** Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:3) – The Spirit of God would not say anything that is inconsistent with what has already been revealed about Jesus, and will confirm the lordship of Jesus. When we see the Holy Spirit in operation, we should have no doubts that it is Him because His operation and manifestation line up with the Word of God. This is one reason Paul is able to say that prophecy can be judged, because there should be sufficient evidence of the truth of the prophecy. The same can be said about the other manifestations of the Spirit.
- 2) **Confirmatory methods:** The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit actually testifies about our own salvation, and testifies to our own spirit. In the same way, the Holy Spirit will confirm His presence, and will do so through many methods:
  - a. **Signs:** “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues... (Mark 16:17)
- 3) **Conviction:** And by this we know<sup>fn</sup> that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (I John 3:19-22). If we are “off base”, but also trying to follow the Lord, the Holy Spirit will convict us of the truth.

## Word of Wisdom

Wisdom is defined as:

- the ability to discern what is true, right or lasting
- the ability or result of an ability to think and act utilizing knowledge

This spiritual gift is not just “being wise”. This is wisdom that is given at the time it is needed – wisdom that would otherwise be gained by life experience or study, but which the Holy Spirit provides as He is manifest.

*And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul **through the Spirit** not to go up to Jerusalem. – Acts 21:4*

The disciples that Paul stayed with were not simply looking at natural circumstance to warn Paul. It was through the Spirit of God that direction for Paul was given. Paul was determined to go, and right after was when Agabus the prophet entered and prophesied about what would happen to Paul. In this case, the spiritual gift looked exactly like earthly wisdom, but there was no reason why the disciples should have this wisdom concerning Paul.

## Discerning of Spirits

*Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said **to the spirit**, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. – Acts 16:16-18*

Discerning of spirits by the Spirit of God allows us to sense or see the spirits that are behind a person, or that may be present within a situation. In the situation in Acts, Paul was getting some "free publicity" from a well-known person. What the girl said was absolutely true, so there was no reason to think anything of it, yet Paul sensed something different – something wrong. Whether Paul knew her background or not, he was able to discern that the message was not coming from the right place. A woman on her way home got out of her car, and saw two men coming toward her. She sensed something about them so she prepared herself for what was about to happen. This wasn't fear, because she was prepared. In her statement she said that one of the men "had the devil in him". The Holy Spirit moved in her to discern the spirits of those that were approaching.

As a caution, discerning of spirits is not simply "seeing demons" or looking for evil intent in people. The woman at the well listened to Jesus, and at a certain point said, "Sir, I perceive you are a prophet". The Holy Spirit was revealing to her the spirit of the one she was dealing with. Similarly with us, we can be in situations where the Holy Spirit will reveal the spirit of a person or place so we can act accordingly.