

Discerning of Spirits 1

A 'Word of Knowledge' is to do with actual events that have either happened in the past or are happening at present. A 'Word of Wisdom' is often linked with a 'Word of Knowledge' and is about what to do in those circumstances, so is always a future action. The third Gift of the Spirit which is known as one of the Revelation Gifts, is the gift of 'Discerning of Spirits'. Unlike the other two Revelation Gifts, the 'Discerning of Spirits' is not to do with actual events, but is solely about the spirit part of a person.

The natural human spirit

Everyone has a natural human spirit – that is how God created us to be; body, soul and spirit. As well as giving us a spirit, God has also given to all of us the ability to use that spirit in order to discern naturally how another person is feeling in his/her spirit. Here are some examples of this:-

** When a born-again Christian is holding a conversation with another born-again believer, there is a sort of 'gelling' of spirits. It is not something that we can see with our eyes or know by what we hear spoken; it is a connection of spirits.

** If two people are in a room arguing and they stop their conversation as we enter the room, even though we have not heard anything of what has been said, we have in our spirits an uncomfortable feeling because we have discerned what their spirits are like at that moment in time.

** Sometimes a person can be telling us something and we discern that they are either lying to us or hiding something from us. It is not because of something that they have said, it is what we have discerned in their spirit as they speak.

The Gift of 'Discerning of Spirits'

The more we are aware of discernment in a natural way, the more open we will be to God when He wishes to use us and we receive a gift of 'Discernment of Spirits. Many people think that the discerning of spirits is only about bad or evil things, but that is not so at all as there are both good and bad spirits. It is not a fault-finding or mind-reading, but, is God's way of showing us about a spirit or spirits within another individual.

Paul writes in **1 Corin. 12:10**, *'To another is given the ability to distinguish between spirits.'* Here Paul is not speaking about the natural ability of discernment that we all possess, though that is limited, but about a specific time when God shows us the nature of another person's spirit for a particular reason. Like all of the other Gifts of the Spirit, this is something that we are not able to obtain naturally. We only receive the gift when God decides to give it to us. Not everyone receives this particular gift as it may be that God has blessed them with one of the other Gifts of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit (God's Spirit)

John the Baptist was given discernment, through a vision, concerning Jesus. God had already told John that when he saw the Holy Spirit come down from Heaven like a dove onto the person whom he was baptizing, then that would be the Messiah. **John 1: 29-33**. The vision of the dove was only seen by John and was given to him by a supernatural discernment. Other people were there but it does not seem that they were able to see what John saw. The Holy Spirit Himself was not a dove but that is how He

was manifested on that occasion. There was not an actual dove on the head of Jesus, it was what John was shown by God in his spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit could also be seen supernaturally. **Acts 2: 3-4**. There appeared to be tongues of fire on each person's head. Again, it was not that the Holy Spirit Himself became tongues of fire; it was how the people saw Him in their spirits.

Good angels

In **John 20: 1-12**, we can read about Mary Magdalene, Peter and John going to the tomb of Jesus. When Peter and John went into tomb they saw the handkerchief and the linen cloths and then they went away. Mary stayed at the tomb and she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been. Peter and John saw only the handkerchief and the cloths but did not see the angels. Mary saw the angels, which God showed to her supernaturally in her spirit.

We can also read about Paul seeing an angel. **Acts 27: 18-26**. The ship in which he was sailing was in danger of being wrecked in a violent storm. Paul was given a vision of an angel who said that no lives would be lost. Only Paul was given that vision as a gift of 'Discernment of Spirits', none of the other people on the ship saw the vision. God gives the gift on certain occasions for a specific reason. With regard to both the Holy Spirit and angels, it does not seem very often that God gives this gift in the form of a vision.

The nature of the gift

The norm generally appears to be that those receiving the gift are shown something particular concerning another person's spirit. That person may not look any different on the outside because the difference is only within his/her spirit, which cannot be seen naturally. The difference only becomes obvious when God decides to reveal it to another individual, most probably at a time when a problem has arisen, so the issue becomes more important. The believer is given the power to see what other people are not able to see and allows him to see into the spirit world.

Timing

God's timing is always important. As we step out and use the Gifts more often, we will gradually be able to be more aware of God's timing and also how we are to deal with the revelation that has been given to us. It may be intended for our information only and not for sharing, in which case it will help us to know how to pray about the situation and any action that we may need to take personally. If it is shown us in order to help the other person, then it is necessary to arrange a suitable time and place to meet them in order to talk about the sort of help that we might be able to give. If there is any action that needs to be taken publicly, then it needs to be decided if that action fits in with the way the service is moving; alternatively, it may not be appropriate on that day and may be intended for another day. We may not always get it right but God is quite able to cope with our mis-timings! We will become stronger Christians as God uses us through His Gifts. Alongside this, the Church as a whole will benefit and become God's Church, not ours. He will build His Church, but, He does not do it by Himself, He chooses to use each one of us to achieve His ultimate aim.