



## ***Resourcing for Prayer Network Guidelines***

# **SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE (2)**

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**Many Prayer Groups and Intercessors are asking us for help in knowing what God is saying to us today. God answers prayer, but not always in the way we expect. How do we receive guidance from the Holy Spirit? How can we discern what God is saying and not confuse it with our imagination?**

There are two essential elements in understanding what God is saying to us. Last month we dealt with "**Discernment**" and this month with "**Discerning between spirits**".

## **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS**

Distinguishing between spirits is a spiritual gift. In 1 Corinthians 12 it is linked with both prophecy and speaking in tongues. It is a spiritual gift that enables anyone with this gift to discern truth from deception and to know the source of what is being spoken. This spiritual gift is essential for the church or fellowship where prophecy and tongues are practised because both can be infiltrated by the enemy to mislead and deceive believers.

It is possible for someone to begin a prophecy under the direction of the Holy Spirit and then to continue speaking, adding thoughts of their own, which need to be separated from the pure word coming from the Spirit of God. This is where it is essential that the leader of the meeting should have this spiritual gift of distinguishing between spirits. It is also possible for tongues to be corrupted, or for the interpretation to be given from the human spirit rather than from the Holy Spirit. One who has the gift of distinguishing between spirits is needed to prevent the fellowship from being misled.

### **Gifts in the New Testament**

Prophecy is in all three lists of gifts given in the New Testament through the Apostle Paul. They are in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. The Romans 12 gifts are the natural gifts; the 1 Corinthians 12 are the spiritual gifts; and the Ephesians 4 are the Ministry gifts.

Prophecy as a natural gift is speaking the truth clearly. Many people who are not committed Christians can exercise this natural gift of prophecy. There are many secular prophets like Solzhenitsyn who have the ability of clearly stating the truth. This can be recognised by all committed Christians who know the word of God and therefore can recognise truth when they hear it, even when it comes from the lips of unbelievers.

### **Discernment**

All Christians who have a good knowledge of the Bible are able to recognise truth when it is declared by secular prophets but when the secular prophet deviates from the truth non-Christians and many sincere Christians may not be able to recognise that. Mature Christians who know the word of God should have the discernment to recognise false prophecy, but it is only the person with the gift of distinguishing between spirits who can recognise the source from which the words are being spoken and alert others to the danger. A good example is how Jesus dealt with those who were demonically possessed and who

acknowledged him. Paul also had to deal with a girl who followed him declaring, "*These people are servants of the Most High God*" (Acts 16.16-18). What she was saying was true, but Paul was able to see that the source of her knowledge was divination not revelation.

## Gift of Prophecy

Prophecy as a spiritual gift is declaring a word from God. The prophet speaks the revelation he is given by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was foreseeing this when speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper. He says in John 16.12 "*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*"

The Prophet declares **the truth** as he hears it revealed to him, but because he is human and therefore subject to all the limits of humanity, his own spirit may get in the way of transmitting the truth that he is hearing from God and he may either add to or even distort the truth he is receiving. This is where it is essential that there should be someone with the gift of distinguishing between spirits in the fellowship who can recognise when the prophet deviates from the word of God.

## The Spiritual Gifts

All the gifts of the Spirit should be handled with great care for our God is an awesome God and the gifts should be exercised in accordance with Hebrews 12.28 "*acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire*". The spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 are given for the whole body of Christ, for comfort, for encouragement (even rebuke is encouraging if you know it has come from a Loving Father who cares for you! Rebukes will always be conveyed in love if they truly come from God), for building up faith, for enlightenment, revelation, direction, and most importantly - for fulfilling the mission of Christ. The spiritual gifts are not given for individual use or self-aggrandisement. They are given to enable the body of Christ to fulfil the Great Commission.

## Tragedy

It is, perhaps, the greatest tragedy in the history of the Western nations that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not understood by many church leaders when the Spirit of God was poured out afresh upon the church in the 20th century, beginning with the Pentecostal movement in the early 1900s and then reaching all denominations and branches of the church through the charismatic movement in the 2nd half of the century.

## Judgment

God's purpose was to transform and commission the church; to equip believers for the great battles that lay ahead as secular humanism and false religion began to dominate the political and cultural life of the nations. But sadly the gifts were not used to empower the church for battle. They were used to enhance individuals and glorify the ministry of leaders while the things of the world passed them by with the result we have today a nation where godless politicians even dare to defy the God of Creation and change marriage which was part of God's act of creation as between a man and a woman, both made in his image. God's response can only be to allow judgment to fall upon the nations.

## Responsibility of the Righteous

There is a scripture in Psalm 11 that we Christians should read with fear and trembling before our God to whom we are responsible for the use of the gifts he has given, as Jesus declared in his parable of the talents in Matthew 25 where he said that the worthless servant would be thrown outside into the darkness. Psalm 11.3 in the NIV reads, "*When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" But the Hebrew actually says, "*When the foundations are being destroyed, **what should the righteous have done?***" This changes the whole meaning, and emphasises our accountability before God. Surely our response can only be that of self-humiliation and repentance, for who among us has uncompromisingly stood in the gap against the forces of darkness?

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