

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

A STUDY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

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PART 12: THE DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

The discerning of spirits is the seventh gift of the Holy Spirit.

*“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another **discerning of spirits**; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:10)*

Operating in this gift of the Holy Spirit – or any other for that matter – is exciting because it means you are in God’s will and He is choosing to use you for something particular. It is wonderful knowing that the path you’re on is sanctioned by God and receiving His blessing in the form of one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit.

THE SAMARITANS

Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus was traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead to alert villages on the way that He needed food and lodging. When an advance team entered a Samaritan village, they were told that Jesus and His entourage were not welcome because He was on the way to visit the temple in Jerusalem.

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51-53)

James and John became furious at this insult to the Messiah and asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire and kill the people in the village.

“And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luke 9:54)

They were referring to the time when Elijah dealt harshly with the impudent soldiers of King Ahaziah.

“Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.



And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.” (2 Kings 1:9-12)

Jesus had been walking all day and He was likely hungry, thirsty, and tired. The Samaritan leadership of the village showed their hate toward Jesus and His followers when they refused to sell them food. It was toward the end of the day and the thought of having to walk to another village would have raised indignation in the God-man. The human part more than likely wanted retribution, but the godly part rebuked the brothers and told them that they failed to realize what spirit was influencing them.

“But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.” (Luke 9:55-56)

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit compared to the apostles who were motivated by evil spirits. Jesus detected the evil spirits and He rebuked the men for their lack of discernment.

SIMON THE SORCERER

Simon the Sorcerer resided in Samaria where he influenced people through witchcraft. Things were shaken up when Phillip visited the city because the power of the Holy Spirit was greater than the power of Satan.

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip

preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:5-12)

Simon realized that his power was no match for the Holy Spirit. He repented and became a believer in Jesus.

“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” (Acts 8:13)

When the news of an awakening in Samaria reached Jerusalem, the leadership sent Peter and John to check it out. They discovered the new believers in Christ had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, so they instructed the people to come, laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit fell on them.

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:14-17)

When Simon witnessed the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying of hands by the apostles, the sinful nature rose up through the demons of sorcery that had never been cast out, and he offered Peter and John cash in return for bestowing the same power upon him.

“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:18-19)

The gift of discernment was evident in Peter and he harshly rebuked Simon's action, telling him to repent for erroneously thinking he could purchase the Holy Spirit.

“But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:20-23)

Simon was directed to pray for himself. He was afraid of the punishment, but with no real desire to repent, asked Peter to pray for him instead.

“Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” (Acts 8:24)

ELYMAS THE SORCERER

The city of Paphos was located on the southwestern coast of Cyprus, and at the time of Paul, it was the capital of Cyprus. The Roman deputy, Sergius Paulus, heard that Paul and Barnabas had arrived and summoned them to his palace to learn more about God. At the court was a Jewish man named Bar-Jesus “son of Jesus” who was known to be a sorcerer.

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.” (Acts 13:6-7)

Elymas must have been influential at court. He stood next to Paulus and rebuked Paul’s attempt to share Jesus with the Roman deputy.

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” (Acts 13:8)

The gift of discernment was activated in Paul by the Holy Spirit and he called out the sorcerer, rebuking him for perverting the word of God. With great boldness, he cursed Elymas and commanded blindness to come upon him.

“Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.” (Acts 13:9-11)

This bold action by Paul, accompanied by the power display which resulted in loss of eyesight to Elymas, convinced the deputy that Jesus was real and he became a Christian.

“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” (Acts 13:12)

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

The apostle John addressed the need for discernment. He warned that not all spirits are from God. There are evil spirits who will try to deceive Christians. False prophets are possessed by evil spirits. John labeled these evil spirits as “antichrist.”

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

John defines these spirits as “deniers that God.” Every Jew that denies that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God incarnated into a human body is possessed by the spirit of Antichrist. Any religion that rejects Jesus as God is driven by evil spirits.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (1 John 4:4-6)

CASTING OUT DEMONS

Christians should be baptized in the Holy Spirit and have the gift of discernment in order to effectively cast out demons or evil spirits from an afflicted person. It is helpful to know what kind of demons you are dealing with. Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan.

“Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.” (Matthew 12:22-29)

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I first encountered demons in 1969 when a suicidal person (Jim) came to me for help. I did not really know what to do, so I confronted the demons in the name of Jesus and commanded them to leave. And they did!

Time progressed and I encountered more people who wanted to be set free from the demons plaguing them. I realized that I needed more education in this field and one of the first books I discovered was *Pigs in the Parlor* by Frank and Ida Mae Hammond. They compiled a list of the most common demons afflicting people and I began using it.

God was merciful to Jim and used my desperate prayer to set him free from demons that were plaguing him. But I realized that I needed the gift of discernment to be more effective in helping people. I purchased a copy of *The Discerning of Spirits* by Frank Hammond to learn how a seasoned minister used the seventh gift of the Holy Spirit when confronted by demonized people.

When the apostle Paul encountered Elymas at the court of the deputy, he did not have time to ask questions. The Holy Spirit showed him that the sorcerer was deeply into the power of Satan and the apostle used that information to confront Elymas and put him out of commission.

If God is leading you into deliverance ministry or some other form of counseling, I highly recommend that you pray for the gift of discernment.

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?