

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
THE GENUINE AND THE COUNTERFEIT

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## INTRODUCTION

The following information is an effort to equip readers with some resources for discerning the nature of many ideas, impulses, experiences, and events of life. Points are based both on specific Scriptures and the general tenor of the Bible, as well as practical insights. Admittedly, discerning good from evil is not always simple, particularly in light of the fact that the best counterfeits are always the most difficult to identify. Nevertheless, by comparing and contrasting good and evil, it is hoped that some valuable guidelines will emerge that will better equip readers to identify good from bad, right from wrong, what is from God and what is not. As one's discernment develops, it is also hoped that one's ability to classify various ideas, impulses, experiences, and events more accurately will be developed as well.

## BEWARE OF SUBJECTIVITY

First, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must beware of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Evil tends to urge individuals to rely upon themselves for interpreting the Scriptures and for interpreting life's experiences. Conversely, God's Holy Spirit provides objective verification, "speaking" to man through man's spirit and mind, and generally incorporates the following elements in the process: other godly people (Prov. 1:5); the light and laws of nature (Rom. 1:20); the powers and faculties of reason (1 Cor. 14:20); the conscience (1 Tim. 4:2); the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17); and human experience. When discussing the influence of other godly people, C. S. Lewis once wrote, "One of the things my reason tells me is that I ought to check the results of my own thinking by the opinions of the wise."<sup>2</sup> The Bible teaches that a person of understanding will acquire godly counsel (Prov. 1:5), that in the abundance of godly counselors there is victory (Prov. 11:14), that consultation with godly counselors fosters success (Prov. 15:22), that those who listen to reproof acquire understanding (Prov. 15:32), and that

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<sup>1</sup>Tricia Tillin, "How to Know the Difference," *The End Times* (March/April 1995): 12.

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 27.

person sharpens person (Prov. 27:17). The presence of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding, human instructors are still indispensable; this is why God gives pastor-teachers as gifts to congregations (Eph. 4:11).

As to the final element listed, human experience, it is simply the means by which man comes into contact with truth. Experience is not itself truth,<sup>3</sup> although truth is sometimes "mediated" by experience. God speaks through ordinary occurrences, not always through prayer closets or crises (Jer. 18:2). Moreover, circumstances in life are not necessarily a commentary on God's love and involvement therein; bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. Life is influenced from at least four sources, and these origins are not to be confused. Life involves acts of God, acts of demonic spiritual entities, acts of man, and acts of nature.

Further, even for Jesus self-testimony and mere human testimony were insufficient sources of authentication by themselves (John 8:12-20), that is why He summoned other witnesses (John 5:31-47) like John the Baptist (John 5:33), miracles, works, and signs (John 5:36), His Father (John 5:37), the Scriptures (John 5:39), and Moses (John 5:46). Witnesses gain

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<sup>3</sup>John P. Newport, *What Is Christian Doctrine?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984), 32.

credence to the degree that their testimony agrees; thus, the believability of the Christian testimony becomes solidified because of strong agreement from so many witnesses.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit's use of mediation by way of Scripture, employment of traditional orthodoxy, and application of human reason greatly reduce the possibility of the subjective tendency to identify impressions from the Holy Spirit with impressions from one's human spirit, or any other spirit.<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit's use of mediation safeguards objectivity by providing external means of verification,<sup>6</sup> which is a marked contrast with cults, non-Christian religions, and unorthodox "Christian" sects.

Also, human attestation to impressions or events is never sufficient, because others, too, can be misled or mistaken. One can always find someone who agrees, thus ratifying one's own subjective notion, circumventing any shred of objectivity (1 Kings 22:1-36). This is why it is wise to consult those with whom one does not always agree.

Moreover, one should also avoid situations which encourage or demand isolation from outside influences. This practice

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>5</sup>Boyd Hunt, "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit: The Effector of God's Purpose," (Seminary Hill Station, Fort Worth, TX: by the author, 1989), 59.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

clearly suggests indoctrination rather than education, implies something which is brain-washing and not mind-fulfilling, and intimates something resembling mind-manipulation rather than artful, competent persuasion (2 Cor. 5:11). Lastly, the words of C. S. Lewis once again ring true here regarding subjectivity when he writes, "Unless the measuring rod is independent of the things measured, we can do no measuring."<sup>7</sup> Beware of subjectivity.

#### BEWARE OF WHAT APPEALS TO PRIDE

Second, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also beware of what appeals to pride (1 John 2:16).<sup>8</sup> Evil powers appeal to the flesh, frequently attempting to "wow" the unsuspecting with sensational feats (Luke 4:1-13). Evil routinely strokes the pride of mankind by promising fame or success (Luke 4:1-13). Pride sometimes comes cloaked in seemingly spiritual activities (for example faith-healers). Christians certainly believe in the power of God to heal any infirmity, but also ought to understand that there is only one faith-healer: Jesus Christ. Modern-day faith-healers betray their true intentions by making merchandise of their alleged gift or "showing off." Jesus

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<sup>7</sup>Lewis, 73.

<sup>8</sup>Tillin, 12.

regularly healed in private, not wishing to make a display of His miracles (Matt. 9:25) and frequently instructed those whom He healed not to tell anyone (Matt. 9:30). The usual way the Holy Spirit works is through the ordinary and not the extraordinary<sup>9</sup> (John 9:6). Be highly suspicious when a price tag is placed on something spiritual or religious. Scrutinize closely and look for profit motives. If economic advantage is discovered, do not affiliate with, or support, that person or ministry. Any hint of deception raises questions about legitimacy.

Additionally, some even arrogantly presume that physical contact with their person, objects related to their person, or touch results in a medium for transferring healing power. This usually occurs in the form of "laying on of hands," and discloses a lack of understanding regarding the symbolism latent in this action. Jesus frequently healed without touching (Luke 5:20, 24-25; 6:10). Check the Scriptures carefully and you will find that Jesus did not even need to be in the same county in order to heal (John 4:46-54). The lesson to be learned is that God's Holy Spirit can be neither tamed nor manipulated for use according to one's own whims (Acts 8:19).<sup>10</sup> The genuine work of the Holy

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<sup>9</sup>Hunt, 54.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 14.

Spirit is marked by a "quaintness" on behalf of the Christian, which clearly distinguishes the actions of the Holy Spirit from psychological manipulation, excessive emotionalism, or any other stereotyped pattern of response.<sup>11</sup> Unlike New Age channeling and spiritism, the Holy Spirit is the one and only entity contacting, compelling, and instructing concerning one faith, one Lord, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There is only one Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:4), yet, New Age religion proposes many holy spirits.

Satan possesses the passion and knowledge of a "renegade," and often performs miracles resembling those done by Christ.<sup>12</sup> The Bible discloses that false Christs and bogus prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). Likewise, the antichrist, the beast from the sea, whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, will demonstrate powers including signs and counterfeit wonders (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:3). The second beast, the beast from the earth, also known as the false prophet, will perform great signs too, like making fire come down from heaven (Rev. 13:13). Moreover, spirits of demons are said to emerge from mouths and perform signs (Rev. 16:13-14), suggesting

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>12</sup>John P. Newport, *Demons, Demons, Demons: A Christian Guide Through the Murky Maze of the Occult* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 81.

lying, deceptive words.<sup>13</sup> Do not let yourself be "wowed" by demonstrations of power. Refuse to be led by feelings (Rom. 7:15-25). Humble the flesh under the Holy Spirit of God (1 Pet. 5:6). Beware of what appeals to pride.

#### BEWARE OF COMPULSIONS

Third, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also beware of compulsions.<sup>14</sup> God never forces. He draws, woos, courts, and entreats. Conversely, evil influences routinely arrive with overpowering, almost irresistible intensity.<sup>15</sup> The Holy Spirit of God is "received" voluntarily, not forced, as is evidenced by the active voice, not the passive, for *lambano* [*labete*] in John 20:22. God's Holy Spirit beckons cooperation based on faith and reason. But evil coerces in an effort to control. This is why experiences that smack of compulsion, urge haste, or insist on illogical compliance are always questionable. If reason is not used, there is little to prevent people from accepting distorted forms of Christianity or embracing non-

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<sup>13</sup>John P. Newport, *The Lion and the Lamb* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1986), 261.

<sup>14</sup>Tillin, 12.

<sup>15</sup>Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer, *Opening to Channel: How to Connect with Your Guide* (Tiburon, CA: H. J. Kramer, 1987), 134.

Christian religions.<sup>16</sup> Apostolic Christianity has always employed reason. John Newport emphasized this even more when he said that the early Christians out-thought, outlived, and out-died pagans.<sup>17</sup> Evil spirits seek the loss of ordinary selfhood on behalf of their hosts, whereas God's Holy Spirit points to Christ, not to Himself.<sup>18</sup> The Holy Spirit-filled Christian is always allowed conscious control over his or her behavior (1 Cor. 14:32), without altering the sound of the voice, the vocabulary, or the personality, all of which occur regularly with channeling and other alleged spirit influence. Even those who spoke in other languages in Acts 2 knew what they were saying and used their own vocabulary. God simply worked a miracle by obliterating the language barrier, a reversal of what happened at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Beware of compulsions.

#### BEWARE OF SENSATIONS

Fourth, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also beware of sensations.<sup>19</sup> God frequently communicates with one's inner person, one's spirit, but not to the exclusion of the

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<sup>16</sup>Newport, *Christian Doctrine*, 162.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>18</sup>Tillin, 12.

<sup>19</sup>Tillin, 12.

mind. This means that Christian prayer is to be intelligent communication between two persons, God and man, not between non-persons.<sup>20</sup> Christian prayer is to be meaningful communication, not meaningless repetition of the same word over and over (Matt. 6:7).<sup>21</sup> Love for God is expressed through the heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37). God's Word is also to be received with an eagerness of mind (Acts 17:11). God's Holy Spirit seeks to renew the mind of each believer, not neutralize or exclude it (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). Believers are said to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). Christians are thus to be of sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7), and God wants the mind and the conscience of each Christian to be undefiled (Titus 1:15). Moreover, the law of God is to be implanted into the mind (Heb. 8:10), and God's Word even urges Christians to gird their minds for action (1 Pet. 1:13). Evil communications, however, frequently encourage the nullifying of the mind. The riddles of Zen Buddhism are specifically designed to neutralize the mind, claiming that in so doing, the mind is being prepared for enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, God's Word commands that believers maintain sobriety and alertness (1 Pet.

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<sup>20</sup>John P. Newport, *Christ and the New Consciousness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978), 29.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 53.

5:8). Further, evil seeks to manipulate the body, mind, and emotions (2 Cor. 10:5), and may use alcohol, drugs, psychic toys, such as Ouija boards, automatic writing, tarot cards, or chanting mantras to do so. Even New Age author Mary T. Browne argues that over-indulgence in alcohol opens one up to attract astral beings floating about in the air.<sup>23</sup> She further states that people cannot be possessed unless they open themselves up to possession by indulging in substances.<sup>24</sup> Browne also writes, "Why do you think that another name for alcohol is *spirits*? It's because alcohol attracts them."<sup>25</sup> Harold Sherman, author of *The Dead Are Alive: They Can and Do Communicate with You* says, "There is increasing sober evidence that 'spirit possession' is more prevalent than has yet been recognized by the psychiatric and medical professions, and it is due, in my opinion, to mankind's widespread use of drugs of one kind or other, excessive drinking coupled with the high-tension living."<sup>26</sup> Even more uncommon for a New Age author, Mary T. Browne posits that playing with psychic

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<sup>23</sup>Mary T. Browne, *Life After Death: A Renowned Psychic Reveals What Happens to Us When We Die* (New York, NY: Ivy Books division of Ballantine Books, 1994), 94.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>26</sup>Harold Sherman, *The Dead Are Alive: They Can and Do Communicate with You* (New York, NY: Fawcett Crest, Published by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, 1993), 239.

toys can ruin lives, since these toys can be used as tools for conjuring up "undeveloped" or "demonic" spirits.<sup>27</sup> Another New Age author, Raymond Buckland, also cautions against "indiscriminate use of items like Ouija boards," contending that such use "has brought problems to people in the past."<sup>28</sup> While evangelical Christians may not agree with Browne, Sherman, and Buckland regarding their New Age pantheistic theology, it is worth pointing out that they, too, are aware of evil's attempt to influence man by way of sensations.

God's power is not merely goose-bumps that leave one's character unchanged (1 Cor. 13:1-13). Every Christian must be on the lookout for paganism ornately arrayed in religious garb. True children of God are recognized by their love for God, which is demonstrated regularly in their observance of His commandments (John 14:21; 1 John 5:2), done not in order to become a child of God, but rather because one is a child of God. One critical point of distinction between pagan religion and biblical religion is obvious: pagan religion seeks to place God, or gods, at man's disposal, whereas biblical religion is intent on placing man at

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<sup>27</sup>Browne, 109.

<sup>28</sup>Raymond Buckland, *Doors to Other Worlds: A Practical Guide to Communicating with Spirits* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1997), 59.

God's disposal. This priority of placement is an indication of a genuine, permanent change, as opposed to a temporary sensation. Further, the Holy Spirit is intensely sensitive to sin and recoils from it (Eph. 4:30).<sup>29</sup> Genuine saving faith will always result in a changed life (James 2:17). Even demons believe that Jesus is the Christ; yet, this sort of "belief" makes no difference in their conduct, the best they can do is tremble in terror (James 2:19). Those who have been transformed by the authentic power of God, through the potency of His indwelling Holy Spirit, clearly understand that God's love does not always soothe and comfort. God's power usually humbles mankind. It is never a "sloppy agape" (1 Cor. 5:2). It often rebukes, chastises, and challenges (Heb. 12:6). Evil often pridefully seeks to exalt the self, whereas God's love stimulates growth, fostering feelings of spiritual humility and humble spiritual inferiority. Conversely, counterfeit powers stifle genuine spiritual maturity, often giving a false sense of "having arrived," frequently cultivating feelings of spiritual superiority (Gnosticism). Love, so called, stemming from sources other than God, is nothing more than an enjoyable sensation urging individuals to follow their innate first impressions, sometimes indiscreetly arguing that the

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<sup>29</sup>R. A. Torrey, *The Holy Spirit: Who He Is and What He Does* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1927), 22.

first to speak is the spirit, while the second to speak within is the self.<sup>30</sup> Beware of sensations.

#### BEWARE OF PICK AND CHOOSE THEOLOGY

Fifth, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also beware of "pick and choose" theology. This means beware when people "go-to-seed" on a topic such as the second coming, Calvinism, faith-healing, tongues, demonology, "second blessing" and more. "Pick and choose" theologians study their interests, rarely seeking the whole counsel of God, regularly avoiding more important doctrines. Likewise, beware of any teaching that interprets the New Testament in "light" of the Old Testament, an unorthodox hermeneutical approach not embraced by evangelical theologians. The Old Testament must be understood in the light shed by the New Testament,<sup>31</sup> not the New Testament understood in the darkness of the Old Testament. God's disclosure to mankind has been progressive. Older disclosures were never intended to be the final words regarding God's covenant with mankind, they were pointing toward a completed New Covenant. Conversely, reading the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament should create an

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<sup>30</sup>Buckland, 114-5.

<sup>31</sup>Newport, *Lion*, 158. See also David Ewert, *And Then Comes the End* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 52.

"aha" experience. While the Old Testament must be regarded as inspired and deemed a valuable source for understanding the New Testament, it is not the final word of God's covenant. The New Testament alone is the final word from God. Beware of "pick and choose" theology.

#### DEMAND AGREEMENT WITH THE WORD OF GOD

Sixth, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must always demand agreement with the Word of God.<sup>32</sup> Nothing coming from God contradicts Scripture, defined as the sixty-six canonical books comprising the Bible. So-called "Gospels" contrary to the New Testament evangel are counterfeit (Gal. 1:9). Moreover, refusal to listen to the apostles and other canonical authors, and heed their words, marks a spirit of deceit, according to the Apostle John (1 John 4:6). How does the "religious" person regard and handle God's Word? If they listen not and heed not, they are not. Reliance upon the apostles and other canonical authors, and promoting the heeding of their words, marks a spirit of truth. One must make God's Word the final judge, not experiences, additional texts, so-called new

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<sup>32</sup>Tillin, 12.

revelations, or new revelators. Demand agreement with the Word of God from any spiritual representative.

#### KNOW SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A FALSE TEACHER

Seventh, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also know some characteristics of a false teacher. False teachers may appear to be brothers or sisters in Christ, but are instead murderous enemies, like Cain, who do not abide in Christ (1 John 3:11-18). Other peculiarities include sensuality (2 Pet. 2:2, 18), greed (2 Pet. 2:3, 14), despising of authority (2 Pet. 2:10), reviling where they have no knowledge (2 Pet. 2:12), reveling (2 Pet. 2:13), adultery (2 Pet. 2:14), instability of soul (2 Pet. 2:14), appearing as bubbling springs producing pure water, but having no depth of supply (2 Pet. 2:17), and turning away from God's holy commandments (2 Pet. 2:21). Know some characteristics of a false teacher.

#### KNOW THAT A PASSIVE MIND OR BODY IS OPEN TO DECEPTION

Eighth, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also know that a passive mind or body is open to deception.<sup>33</sup> As discussed above, God provided mankind with intellectual powers;

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

thus, His way is to appeal to man's reasoning faculties. Therefore, God's guidance never requires the emptying of the mind, that is to say passive activity rather than active. Two cases in point come to mind wherein the primary activity is passive, meaning done independently of the person. The emphasis of Universalism is passive as is the emphasis of hyper-Calvinism. Christians must carefully examine everything, and hold what is good (1 Thess. 5:21). Moreover, reason can be used to check false claims; "mindlessness is not a Christian virtue."<sup>34</sup> Along these same lines, one must beware of visions, voices, and other quasi-supernatural occurrences, for they can happen, or at least seem to happen, when one empties one's reasoning. Anything that comes when one's mental faculties are partially disengaged, whether asleep, intoxicated, or under the influence of a drug or trance, is highly questionable. Further, "authorities" do not always agree regarding their interpretation of dreams.<sup>35</sup> Some interpretations of a dream are alleged to apply to the future, thus implying an already existing blueprint for life, often associated with karma or predestination. In most cases, the

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<sup>34</sup>Newport, *Christian Doctrine*, 12.

<sup>35</sup>Edward Frank Allen, *The Complete Dream Book* (Philadelphia, PA: J. P. Lippincott Co., subsidiary of Harper & Row, Publishers, 1938; reprint, New York, NY: Warner Books, 1967), 23.

interpretation is allegorical rather than literal. But a bad event in a dream can be interpreted as a portent of something good about to happen (antithetical); yet, some dreams are interpreted forthrightly (good dream good happening; bad dream bad happening). Frequently, the interpretations become purely subjective, too much so to be dependable guides.

Because dream interpretation is without rules, it is both ambiguous and unreliable. Therefore, it is appropriate at this point to suggest a criteria for assessing dreams as proposed by James Travis.<sup>36</sup> First, anything God reveals about Himself in a dream will not contradict what has already been revealed about Him in Scripture (Deut. 13:1-5). Second, the experience of dreams or visions is never used to promote the individual (Dan. 2:30; 2 Cor. 12:1-10). Third, dreams or visions from God will be used in a redemptive way, helping preserve truth or encouraging and strengthening one to continue a redemptive activity (Acts 16:9; 18:9). Fourth, Christians do not need to rely on dreams or visions for guidance, since the Holy Spirit indwells each believer. Fifth, when Christians are yielded to the Holy Spirit, they will have insight and understanding which were formerly gained by spiritual people through visions or dreams (Joel 2:28-

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<sup>36</sup>James Travis, "Of Dreams and Visions," *Biblical Illustrator*, Summer 1986, 76.

32; Acts 2:16-17). This makes the dreams and visions secondary, perhaps even obsolete, to the primary illumination of the Holy Spirit. subordinate the dreams and visions to the Holy Spirit, not the Holy Spirit to the visions and dreams. Know that a passive mind or body is open to deception.

#### TEST THE SPIRITS

Ninth, and finally, one who wants to develop spiritual discernment must also test the spirits (1 John 4:1).<sup>37</sup> Christians are exhorted to take pains in examining all things, searching diligently for truth (Prov. 25:2), appraising all things (1 Cor. 2:15). The church at Ephesus was lauded for testing those who called themselves apostles, meaning one sent by God (Rev. 2:2). Therefore, any spiritual manifestation must be tested. God's Holy Spirit is not the least bit defensive about this. Contrastingly, evil spirits, while often subtle, are defensive (Mark 5:1-9). Any spiritual manifestation from God will have no trouble confessing that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, not merely a prophet (1 John 4:1-3). This is why Paul asked the disciples of John the Baptist if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed (Acts 19:1-7). Test spirits and attitudes (1 John 4:1-3). Test those

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<sup>37</sup>Tillin, 12.

who claim to be sent from God (Rev. 2:2). The Holy Spirit will not be defensive at all, because it is understood that the Bible teaches Christians to do so. Why would God's Holy Spirit be defensive when one is simply following biblical instructions? That is the point: He will not be. Jesus Himself routinely submitted to questioning purposely designed to test Him (Matt. 19:3; Mark 10:2). Ask probing questions just as Paul did (Acts 19:1-7). Then, the ultimate test is what one does with Jesus Christ and says about Him (1 John 4:2-3). Accept no ambiguities: many theologies are cunningly concealed and slyly articulated so as to appeal to ordinary, unlearned Christians; be learned. Personal Bible reading (quiet time), attending Bible Study (Sunday School) and Discipleship Training, and listening regularly to sound Bible preaching can help develop anyone wishing to grow in the faith. Notice also in Paul's exchange the assumption that every believer should have received the Holy Spirit upon the occasion of placing faith in Christ Jesus (Acts 19:1-7). The Trinity cannot be fragmented. The Holy Spirit is received at the moment of conversion.

Additionally, when testing the spirits, beware of quoted but misapplied Scripture. Evil spirits, like Satan in tempting Jesus, may quote Scripture but routinely misapply its meaning and its intent. This is perhaps the greatest "tattle-tale" of all,

provided one understands Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). Never think that the devil does not know Scripture, because he does.

Further, beware when fascination with mythological exegesis is present. In fact, it is always wise to beware of allegorical interpretations unless the Bible clearly states that the text is an allegory. Beware of what is said to have been given cryptically and then deciphered. Beware when human ignorance is termed as the problem, and knowledge, enlightenment, or awakening are taught as the cure. Likewise, beware of the esoteric, that is to say that which is overly rich in allusion, presupposing more than is explicitly stated. Also, beware of worship practices and prayers which utilize chanting, muttering, secret mantras, and anything resembling vain repetition (Matt. 6:7). And, beware when anyone other than a canonical (biblical) author claims to have had direct inspiration, or direct revelation, from God.<sup>38</sup>

Demand conformity to Christ such that any voice claiming to be the Holy Spirit must square with what is known about Christ as evidenced by Scripture, traditional orthodoxy, and sound human

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<sup>38</sup>Mary Baker Eddy writes, "In the year 1866, I discovered the Christ Science or divine laws of Life, Truth, and Love, and named my discovery Christian Science. God had been graciously preparing me during many years for the reception of this final revelation of the absolute divine Principle of scientific mental healing." See Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (N.p.: 1890; reprint, Boston, MA: Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker Glover Eddy, 1934), 107.

reason.<sup>39</sup> Spirits do not have flesh and bones like the resurrected Christ (Luke 24:39). Therefore, if some apparition appears and has no flesh and bones, reject it. Evil spirits have no bodies. Lucifer apparently lost his angelic body after his rebellion against God and expulsion from heaven (Luke 10:18). Perhaps this is why many conjecture that Satan inhabited a serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1) and why he inhabited Judas Iscariot (John 13:27); he needed a body from which to operate the most devilishly. Satan is called the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). This is a possible reference to bodiless, invisible entities. Demon is the name given to fallen angels who followed Lucifer in his revolt (Rev. 12:9). They are also known as spiritual hosts (Eph. 6:12) and may have included up to one third of all angels (Rev. 12:4). They have no body either. Demons, too, desire to inhabit humans or animals (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-37). This casts doubt upon the interpretation of fallen angels engaging in sexual relations with humans and producing half-breed monstrosities known as Nephilim or giants (Gen. 6:1-4). The "sons of God" spoken of in this passage may have been demon-possessed, but were not demons. Evil spirits (fallen angels), including Lucifer, cannot reproduce,

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<sup>39</sup>Hunt, 57-8.

have no DNA or physical bodies, and thus need cooperative physical bodies. An immaterial appearance of something or someone not capable of being touched is to be rejected (Luke 24:39). The unfallen angels of the Lord are not apparitions, since they were seen (Gen. 18:2), touched (Gen. 19:10, 16), knew thoughts (Gen. 18:12-13), and could eat (Gen. 18:8). Likewise, the risen Christ could also eat (Luke 24:43), thus helping distinguish the material from the immaterial.

Certainly, one important test of anything is to examine the results it produces, so look at the fruit (Matt. 12:33). One may not be able to identify a tree by its bark, leaves, or trunk, but almost anybody can identify a tree by its fruit. Also, prophets must never be out of control (1 Cor. 14:32). Unlike ecstatic, seemingly uncontrollable outbursts of tongue speakers, apostolic preachers were orderly and in charge of themselves. Self-control must always be present. Divine inspirations were not characterized by ungovernable, compulsive behaviors like those of pagan religions. This effectively rules out any claim of being overwhelmed by spiritual ecstasy.<sup>40</sup> No one gets so much religion

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<sup>40</sup>Fred D. Howard, *1 Corinthians: Guidelines for God's People* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1983), 119.

so as to lose one's senses.<sup>41</sup> In true prophecy, self-consciousness and self-command are never lost.<sup>42</sup>

Lastly, testing of spirits is also done by evaluating the content of the message or claim, not just the manner in which it was communicated (1 John 4:1-6). Remember, too, that God's prophet is never wrong (Deut. 18:20-22), channelers, psychics, and false teachers frequently are wrong. Do not believe every spirit (1 John 4:1). The spirit or person must confess that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (1 John 4:2) and the information given must agree in full with what has been written by the apostles and biblical authors (1 John 4:6). Test the spirits.

#### CONCLUSION

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The writer's hope is that Christians may faithfully endeavor to interpret Scripture by applying universally accepted hermeneutical principles (interpretive guidelines). Moreover, Christians must be careful to explain experiences of life in light of Scripture, rather than

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<sup>41</sup>Raymond Bryan Brown, *1 Corinthians*, in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Acts-1 Corinthians*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 381.

<sup>42</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3, *The Epistles of Paul* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 272.

erroneously attempting to interpret Scripture in the darkness of life's experiences. Given the aforementioned suggestions, discerning what is from God and what is not ought to become a simpler task. God is neither the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), nor of deception (Num. 23:19), and, therefore, wants people to know Him, His character, and His nature, the truths of which have already been adequately revealed in His Word, in the person of Jesus Christ, and through the ministry of His indwelling Holy Spirit. He will never be a God of disorder, commotion, or disruption. He will never inspire confusion at a worship service. He inspires orderliness and reverence, which are benchmarks of His church. Minimal orderliness in a worship service translates into minimal dignity for that congregation.

Finally, remember that the worst kind of evil is that which is the best disguised. Know the difference by being wary of subjectivity, what appeals to pride, compulsions, sensations, and "pick and choose" theology. Demand agreement with the Word of God, know some characteristics of a false teacher, understand that a passive mind or body is open to deception, and by all means, relentlessly test the spirits.