

## Discernment

### Paul in Berea

Berea is a city in Macedonia to which Paul, Silas and Timothy went when they were persecuted at Thessalonica. When they also had to leave Berea they went to the coast and sailed to Athens. Sopater, one of Paul's companions, came from Berea. In the present day, it is called Verria.

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. **Acts 17**<sup>10-12</sup>

Like the Bereans, we should:

- Receive the message with great eagerness.
- Examine the Scriptures to see if it is true.

But, we need to avoid the extremes of:

- Embracing everything in ignorance and naivety.
- Rejecting everything with cynicism and skepticism.

### Watch out for counterfeits

Counterfeits are everywhere:

A Money Programme survey, conducted by Ipsos Mori, suggests that the most popular fake product in Britain is the DVD.

Of those surveyed, 19% said they had either bought or suspected they had bought a counterfeit, and of this group one in three admitted to buying a dodgy DVD.

The Money Programme follows investigators as they try to shut down illegal factories and clamp down on the criminals selling tens of thousands of fake DVDs.

At one West London market, the Metropolitan Police and investigators from the film industry's own anti-piracy body FACT, or Federation Against Copyright Theft, seized £40,000 worth of counterfeit DVD's ,including the latest Hollywood releases.

The British Video Association believes that nearly 80 million fake DVDs are bought each year in Britain, and it appears to be a growing problem. In 2007 Fact seized 2.8 million fake DVDs, a 74% increase on the previous year.

"The sale of these DVDs is impacting on cinemas, on people's jobs both in the UK and worldwide," says Fact's Eddy Leviten.

"There's a loss to the economy in general."

Many companies keep quiet about the damage the counterfeit trade is doing, but some are willing to speak out. "We would estimate that 30 to 40% of all products bearing our name are counterfeit," says Tony Swaffield, responsible for brand protection at New Era, the world's biggest baseball cap manufacturer.

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For a mid-sized company like New Era, this creates a big problem, and Mr Swaffield doesn't believe New Era's problem is unique.

"If you're talking luxury brands or sporting brands, I would estimate they are affected at the same percentage," he says.

Indeed, it is estimated the global trade in fakes could be worth \$300bn (£150bn) a year, or about 7% of global trade - and its growing all the time.

Electrical goods giant Canon has seen its video cameras, and printer cartridges counterfeited. The whole electronics industry is affected.

In Europe the printer cartridge market is worth some 30bn euros (\$44bn; £22bn) a year and it's estimated that 7% of it is counterfeit.

More worryingly, Canon and other electronics manufacturers are concerned about the rise in counterfeiting of products including batteries and chargers. These fakes have the potential to kill.

"Its one thing to counterfeit the product which can damage a brand, it's another thing to potentially damage the safety and health of the individual consumer," says Canon's James Leipnik.

Source: The *Money* programme, BBC, February 2008

The total worldwide cost of counterfeited goods is around \$1 Trillion.

Counterfeit money, goods, or documents are not genuine, but have been made to look exactly like genuine ones in order to deceive people. - *Collins English Dictionary*

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

**1 Timothy 4<sup>1-2</sup>**

Deception can be deliberate or unintentional. It can come from someone who has previously been reliable because they have let themselves be deceived. It can come wrapped up in religious language (for example "Thus says the Lord") and it can even be accompanied by signs and wonders.

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer.

**Deuteronomy 13<sup>1-3</sup>**

The enemy is a deceiver - a master counterfeiter - and more subtle than we sometimes realize.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" **Genesis 3<sup>1</sup>**

There are many examples of deception in the bible. For example, false prophecy led the people astray in the Old Testament:

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This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. **Jeremiah 23**<sup>16</sup>

...and in the New Testament

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." **Acts 8**<sup>9-10</sup>

...they are with us today

And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. **2Corinthians 11**<sup>12-15</sup>

...and they will be there at the end.

And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. **Revelation 13**<sup>13-14</sup>

### Definitions

Sometimes it is difficult to discern what is happening in the natural world let alone the spiritual realm!

No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away. **Ezra 3**<sup>13</sup>

God has provided his church with the right tools and gifting to be able to discern what comes from him and what comes from somewhere else.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. **Colossians 2**<sup>4</sup>

Discernment: The ability to judge well. *Oxford English Dictionary*

Greek: *aesthesis* meaning:

1. Perception, not only by the senses but by the intellect
2. Cognition, discernment
3. Moral judgement in ethical matters

**Do judge** (in the sense of testing, weighing or the origin of something)

- Prophecy.

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. **1Corinthians 14**<sup>29</sup>

- Where the spirits come from.

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Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

**1John 4<sup>1</sup>**

- Everything.

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. **1Thessalonians 5<sup>19-21</sup>**

**Do not be judgmental** (condemning attitude)

- Without first examining yourself:

Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. **Matthew 7<sup>1-5</sup>**

- If it is just a difference of opinion on issues that are not basic to our faith:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind...

...So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. **Romans 14<sup>1-5 & 22</sup>**

- By being self-righteous and proud of your knowledge

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God. **1Corinthians 8<sup>1-3</sup>**

- Regarding food, drink and special days

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

**Colossians 2<sup>16-17</sup>**

Note: In the bible we are told to judge things, not people. We can tell them they are wrong in their actions (assuming we are sure of this) but we cannot see their hearts or motivation. Only God can do this and will judge everyone when Jesus comes again.

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This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. **Romans 2<sup>16</sup>**

### How do we judge correctly?

- Know your bible, because this is God's standard by which we can rightly judge

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. **2Timothy 3<sup>16-17</sup>**

- Become mature in your faith and live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. **Ephesians 4<sup>14-16</sup>**

When our daughter Karen was a small baby we always had a house full of people from the church youth group and they all wanted to play with her. We had a variety of people in the house most of the time we were awake, including one guy who had severe learning difficulties. Sam was someone whose personal hygiene was not his best feature and his hands were often dirty, particularly his long dirty finger nails.

One day Han had Karen over her shoulder winding her whilst she was talking to some of the young ones. After a while she turned round to find Karen sucking on Sam's thumb. Even worse was the fact that Sam's thumb was a lot cleaner now than the rest of his hand and there was no longer any dirt under his nail!

Babies will suck on anything. They do not know the difference between something that will give them nourishment and what will poison them. They need to mature to be able to discriminate between different sources. In the event Karen survived.

Some people stay as "spiritual babies" never being able to discriminate between what will benefit them and what will not. They have to be fed on milk all of the time because they cannot discern what is good for them. They fail to mature.

If you want to know the basis of being a mature Christian read **Ephesians 4<sup>11-13</sup>**.

- Use the gifting that God has given to you for the benefit of the whole church.

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. **1Timothy 4<sup>14</sup>**

### The gift of discernment

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another *distinguishing between spirits*, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. **1Corinthians 12<sup>8-10</sup>** (My emphasis.)

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Discernment of (distinguishing between) spirits is the Holy Spirit given insight into where something is coming from. Quite simply, is it from God or is it from somewhere else?

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between *right and wrong*. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" **1Kings 3<sup>9</sup>** (My emphasis.)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing *soul and spirit*, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. **Hebrews 4<sup>12-13</sup>** (My emphasis.)

As with all of the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gift of discernment is for the church community for protection and growth.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. **1Corinthians 12<sup>7 & 11</sup>**

This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God. **Philippians 1<sup>9-11</sup>**

The gift of discernment works differently for different people. It may be physical, a feeling a recognition over time that something is not as it seems. Often a disquiet in the spirit - even if everything (or everyone) else seems to be (wildly) enthusiastic and nothing appears to be amiss. People operating in the gift of discernment tend to become more familiar over time and learn to trust what is being received at the time rather than seeing it retrospectively.

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. **Hebrews 5<sup>14</sup>**

Need to be sure that the feeling that something is wrong is not coming from our own soul and is being filtered by our personal preferences, issues or standing before God.

But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! **Matthew 6<sup>23</sup>**

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **Romans 8<sup>5</sup>**

### What if I discern that something might not be from God?

If we are uneasy about something we should act in the same way as for other revelatory gifts:

- Look for confirmation of your suspicions from others who are experienced and can be trusted in this area.

I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord. **Jeremiah 23<sup>4</sup>**

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. **1Corinthians 14<sup>29</sup>**

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- Test the spirits against the bible and in accordance with your own understanding. Am I at peace about this?

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. **1Corinthians 2<sup>14</sup>**

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4<sup>7</sup>**

- Take it to those responsible for dealing with it.

"Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. **Ezekiel 33<sup>2-5</sup>**

- Watch yourself and be prepared to let it go once you have done your part, including being prepared to be wrong or overruled.

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. **Proverbs 4<sup>23</sup>**

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **Galatians 6<sup>1</sup>**

### The gift of discernment is not:

- Deciding upon God's will

Discovering God's will may be informed by the recognition that a person's words or actions may not be under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the bible is quite clear that we find out God's will primarily by knowing Him.

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, **Psalms 105<sup>3-5</sup>**

If we are not in relationship with God, we have no right to know his will. On the other hand, if we love him and seek him for himself, we will find him and know him and will get to know his will through our relationship with him.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. **Romans 12<sup>1-2</sup>**

- Naming unclean spirits

The gift is given for the protection of the church and not for the naming and casting out of demons. There is no mention of the gift of discernment in the process of casting out demons. Only once does Jesus name an evil spirit (**Mark 9<sup>25</sup>**) but the boy's father had said that the spirit had robbed his son of his speech and on another occasion he asked the name of a

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demon possessed man and the response is confusing because both the man and the demons are responding at the same time (**Matthew 8<sup>9-10</sup>**). If we come across demonic activity, in any shape or form, we do not want to engage in conversation with it or know it's name. (Does it make sense to ask a lying spirit what it's name is!) We simply want rid of it. Bind it in Jesus' name and let him deal with it. Be sure it is a demon and not something else - some people make a career out of seeing demons everywhere!

- Pronouncing someone has a spirit of...

We might say someone has the right (or wrong) spirit, they made a spirited attempt or they were caught up in the spirit of the occasion etc. Generally this is just a description of the atmosphere, though it can sometimes be confused with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The gift of discernment will be operating where there is a deception occurring in and around the church (ie where there is something happening that appears to be OK but in reality it is emanating from a source other than the Holy Spirit) and there are prevailing spirits that affect people and places which we need to be aware of. However, a more dangerous practise is to say that such and such a person (or situation) has a spirit of something (eg envy, lust, a Jezebel spirit). These are not biblical terms and more often than not said in a condemnatory way, which says far more about the heart of the person making the pronouncement than the person being pronounced against.

### Summary

See discernment checklist.

- Avoid the extremes of believing everything in naiveté without checking it out or treating everything with cynicism and scepticism.
- Judge well (be discerning) without being judgemental (condemning).
- Know your bible and how to use it correctly.
- Become mature as a Christian.
- The gift of discernment is given to enable the church to enjoy their walk with God in safety. It is not there for us to see the bad side of every person or move of God.

...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. **Acts 17<sup>11</sup>**