

INTRODUCTION

*“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit...”
(1 Corinthians 14:1, NIV, emphasis added)*

- God has called us to eagerly desire (from the Greek word *zēloō*, meaning to pursue with zeal) the spiritual gifts He gives, but this call is in the context of walking in His love (*agape*) as defined in 1 Corinthians 13.

*“Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.”
(1 Corinthians 12:1, emphasis added)*

- It’s God’s desire that we not be ignorant (*agnoeō*) of the gifts that He gives us, but to grow in them and understand what they are, and that it is His Holy Spirit who releases them.

I. WHAT IS THIS GIFT?

A. Distinguishing Between Spirits (Greek phrase *discricion pneumatōn*): The discrimination or judging rightly of the spiritual. This ability Paul describes is an active gift of the Holy Spirit for discernment and right judgement of the things in the spiritual and unseen reality (1 Cor 12:10)

B. We do not naturally have understanding in the things of the spirit (John 3:1-13)

*“⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
(John 3:5-8, emphasis added)*

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’...” (Matthew 11:18-19, emphasis added)

C. This gift is not a work of “angelology” or “demonology”, but rather it is truly a gift from God to be able to have understanding and distinguish between what is of the moving of God’s Spirit, or what is the activity of some other spirit.

II. WHAT IS THIS GIFT FOR?

- A. Paul leads off his explanation of the various giftings of the Spirit to the church in Corinth by telling them he doesn't want them to be ignorant in these spiritual workings, but to have understanding so they are not lead astray from faith in Jesus to false gods like they used to be before coming to faith in Christ.

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-3, emphasis added)

- B. The Apostle John reaffirms this purpose and discernment and encourages the people of God to “test the spirits” (“test” having the same root Greek word as this gift) to confirm it is of the one true God rather than just going along with any sort of spiritual activity or movement.

“¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” (1 John 4:1-6, emphasis added)

- C. Jesus Himself warns us that there will be spiritual deceptions and false spiritual workings that will take place prior to His return, and that we should be vigilant so we are not led astray.

“²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” (Matthew 24:24-28, emphasis added)

- D. Remember that this gift is all about confirming and testifying to Jesus' lordship and work in our midst and drawing people closer to Him by the Holy Spirit. This gift is not the endless focus on other spiritual beings that some give themselves to.

III. WHAT DOES THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS GIFT LOOK LIKE?

A. Judging and confirming the work of the Spirit of Christ to exalt Jesus

*“²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”
(1 Corinthians 14:29, emphasis added)*

“¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, emphasis added)

B. Confronting “false” spiritual workings and movements with God’s love (1 Cor. 13) as empowered by Holy Spirit

⁶ When they (Paul & Barnabas) had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” (Acts 13:6-12, emphasis added)

C. Release of spiritual understanding to be able to bring about deliverance from unclean spirits, physical healing, and ministering the work of God’s holistic salvation in Christ.

“²² Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.” ²³ And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’” (Matthew 12:22-23, emphasis added)