

THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

1 Corinthians 12:10

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As we continue our study today, not only in Corinthians but in the gifts of the Spirit, we look once more at 1 Corinthians 12:10, another in the series of the gifts of the Spirit. To each one, the manifestation is given for the common good, "...to another distinguishing between spirits [or, "the ability to discern spirits"]" (1 Corinthians 12:10, NIV). We might well ask, as we approach the gift of discerning of spirits, what is the gift of discerning of spirits?

The Bible speaks to us of the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and evil spirits.

I. Therefore, the gift of discernment of spirits is to be able to distinguish whether or not a person is acting and speaking by the Spirit of God, by their own human spirit, or under the influence—or possession—of an evil spirit or spirits. Discernment is especially needed in certain areas.

A. It's needed, first of all, to distinguish whether or not a person who comes to us brings a spiritual message from God. Discernment should let us know whether a message is from God or not. Therefore, when the Spirit of God resides in the Christian body and the Christian life, that gift is meant to ascertain and discern whether a person bringing a message is from God. The Pharisees obviously did not have discernment often, for they did not perceive that Jesus was speaking by the Spirit of God, but rather attributed His speaking to an evil, demonic force. However, in Acts 17, some persons who were not Christians at the time exercised good discernment, when upon listening to the apostle Paul's message at Berea, they searched the Scriptures to distinguish whether or not the things which he was saying were true.

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The gift of discernment is needed to distinguish whether or not a person is bringing a message from God, as seen in 1 Corinthians 14:29, where prophets' words in the Christian congregation were to be weighed. And 1 John 4 says that the spirits of the prophets are to be tested.

B. A second reason for the discerning of spirits is to distinguish outward appearances from inward realities. Simon Magus, in Acts 8, wants to buy the gift of the Spirit. From an outward reality, he looks like he's enthusiastic for spiritual things, so much so that if he needs to empty his pockets to get them, he will. But Peter looks upon the heart. The gift of discernment is in operation, and he sees that Simon Magus' motivation is not right at all. And that he is full of bitterness and captive to sin.

Jesus one time exercised discernment with Simon Peter when the Lord said, "I'm going to Jerusalem to die" and Simon Peter said, "No, Lord, You can't do that." Jesus, turning around, rebuked Peter for saying what he did and accused Peter of mouthing the words of Satan (Matthew 16:23). Jesus distinguished between the outer reality of Simon Peter simply being protective of the Lord, and the inner reality that the Lord saw that those kinds of words were really from Satanic origin, in that they wanted to divert Him from His mission in life.

Jesus looked at the Ephesian church and saw it in the Book of Revelation. From the external point of view, it looked like everything was in order. It had correctly fought false doctrine, but Jesus, discerning its inner motivation, said, "No, you've left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). So discernment helps us distinguish outward from inward reality.

C. A third functioning of the gift of discernment is to distinguish whether or not a person is possessed by an evil spirit. Here, perhaps, the most common understanding of discernment functions.

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Several years ago, I walked into a charismatic church. In the foyer of their sanctuary, there were tables filled with tapes and books on demon possession. It seems that this church was into a deliverance ministry and all that the church could focus upon was demons. Everybody was being delivered all the time. Some were even coughing up demons in brown paper bags and making them captive in that way. That church obviously did not have the gift of discerning of spirits, for they were even confused about whether or not a Christian could be possessed, something that a true discerner would have not a question of at all.

Physical and mental illness must not be considered something belonging to demon possession. Psychological problems must not be attributed to possession. The Scriptures do not talk about a spirit of loneliness or a spirit of paranoia as though there were an evil spirit of paranoia or a spirit of inferiority or a spirit of fantasy or a spirit of nicotine. These are matters which reside in the flesh. It would even be nice to cast out the spirit of fat but the way you have to deal with fat is diet and exercise. There's no quick solution.

Part of discernment is to distinguish whether or not a person is possessed by an evil spirit.

We might, having looked briefly at what the discerning of spirits is, look at another question,

What is the difference between discernment functioning in every believer and the gift of discernment functioning, especially active in certain moments and times? It's obvious that the gift of discernment is an attribute that's needed in every Christian's life. Every one of us needs to be able to tell good from evil, to be able to tell right from wrong, to be able to tell when a person is speaking something that is really false or something that's really from God. One of the things that occur when there is a lack of discernment in a whole group of people is the Jim Jones syndrome in the temple in Guyana—a lack of discernment among a whole group of people who started out following Christ. Hebrews 5:14 tells us that solid food is for the mature who, by

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constant use, have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Here the writer of Hebrews is enjoining all Christians to exercise discernment between good and evil.

Even as we have been looking at some of the other gifts—wisdom and knowledge and faith and the ability to ask for healing and prophecy—although we said all these things are shared in common by every believer, there are times they appear to be a special giftedness that come to individuals for special functioning of these most often normal attributes going on in the Christian body.

Do you know what the most basic discernment of all is, in terms of distinguishing between the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of evil? The most basic discernment that is ever asked for, that every Christian must discern, is having the correct answer to this question: “Who do you say that I, the Son of Man, am?” when we say, “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God” (see Matthew 16:16). We are discerning truth, because the Spirit of God Himself bears that testimony in our hearts, that Jesus is Lord. Did Jesus, in His earthly ministry, act by a demonic spirit, did He act by a human spirit, or did He act by the Spirit of God? When we confess Jesus acted by the Spirit of God, we begin, at that moment in our life, to enter into the distinguishing among spirits.

When the gift of discernment, as a special function, occurs in the body, it generally occurs—and I think that scriptural evidence is solidly behind this—as the gift of discernment, the person who exercises it does not go out looking for something to discern. But the gift of discernment especially operates when it is triggered by an event or a situation. The discerner doesn’t go out looking for something to discern, but it is a reaction to what happens. It is especially important equipment of the Spirit for those having spiritual oversight over others, even as we’ve noted that the gift of knowledge is a very important attribute, a gift of the Spirit for those who function in

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the ministry of the Word. Whether teaching it or preaching it. So often the gift of discernment is very critical for those involved in the spiritual oversight capacity.

I want to specifically zero in this morning and spend most of the time on one specific area that concerns many Christians. One specific involvement in respect to discernment. That is, how do we discern demonic involvement in temptations to sin and in human life? When we are being tempted or tested, how do we know if it's ourselves, if it's demonic oppression, if it is possession or what it is that is coming against us?

II. I want to spend some moments talking about that and sharing with you how we all as Christians can discern these matters in our life.

A. When it comes to doing wrong, we must recognize that all of us have temptations that arise out of our sinful human nature and that there's no demonic involvement at all. It's simply coming from the fact that we have a propensity to sin. You and I can sin without outside help! If God killed the devil today, I doubt a whole lot would change in people. We are still carried away by our own evil desires. We have a capability to sin on our own without outside temptation. Jesus said, "From within—out of man's heart—come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly" (Matthew 7:21–22). All these evils come from inside. Not from outside at all. All these evils come from inside.

Jeremiah 17:9—a famous statement, perhaps the verse most remembered by people—says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt. Who can know it?" James 1:14 says, "Each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is dragged away and enticed." Temptation begins at that desire level within us. Therefore, most of our temptations, I would say as sort of a summary, arise out of our own sinful human nature. There is no demonic involvement.

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B. There are, however, temptations which especially arise from demonic origin. For example, Christ had no evil desires, since He did not have an evil, human, sinful nature. Nevertheless, He was tempted. Satan came to Him in the wilderness and tempted Him.

We find, in Paul's writings, that the apostle was buffeted by a messenger of Satan, sent to afflict him—a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7).

We find that Ananias, in Acts 5, is the person of whom Peter says that Satan filled his heart to lie. What is evidently happening in Ananias' case is that he has already begun to move into sin. And beginning to sin in his own human nature, he becomes open, therefore, to special demonic kinds of pressure from the exterior—satanic pressure.

David's census in the Old Testament was incited by Satan (1 Chronicles 21). Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we fight against supernatural forces. There is such a thing as temptation arising from demonic origin.

One of the ways that we can become especially susceptible to temptation arising out of demonic origin is when we yield to our own sinful human impulses. Yielding to sinful human impulses then can create an opening for susceptibility to demonic temptation. For example, Judas had a love for money. That was a sin of his human nature that dogged him in his days of being a disciple of Jesus. John, the Gospel writer, says of Judas that "he stole from the purse" (John 12:6). That sin, in his own evil human nature, opened him up for a greater involvement in his life of temptation, coming from the outside, so that it is later said of Judas, "Satan entered him." In John 8:34, Jesus says, "Everyone who goes on committing sin is a slave to sin." The Lord tells us, in respect to temptations arising from demonic origin that we are to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). We're not to seek that place of being

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tested. But if we do, like Christ, find ourselves being tempted by an outside source, then we can pray, “Deliver us from the evil one.”

C. There is, thirdly, something that happens to human nature that is a result of demonic oppression. Demons exert powerful influence. But under demonic oppression, there is not possession, simply oppression. There are some Old and New Testament examples of this. The Old Testament example that I would cite for demonic oppression is that of Saul, the King. Following his desire to intrude upon the priestly office—1 Samuel 13—and his deliberate disobedience to the prophet in the war with the Amalekites, in 1 Samuel 15, an evil spirit came in to him, episodically or occasionally, for the rest of his life to torment him. He only had moments of relief when David would minister to him in song.

Unger, the Biblical scholar from Dallas Theological Seminary, summarizes the biblical data in the New Testament on manifestations of demonic oppression. It leads to these kinds of things—blindness and hardness of heart toward the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, it says, “The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.” One of the things that can happen with demonic oppression, especially in the unbeliever, is working and feeding upon the disobedience that is in the unbeliever’s life, to try to bring them to a state of total blindness in respect to the gospel.

I’m not one to make a habit of attacking other faiths. But I simply could not help but notice—I thought of an illustration for this particular point, in my experiences when I’ve traveled in Muslim countries, to see, as I’ve talked with Christians who are working, and in some cases ministering, in Muslim countries, how very impenetrable Muslim countries have been to the Christian message for thirteen centuries. There is a feeling that is communicated. There is a

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demonic oppression that rests upon a country, a group of people that brings a perversion of the human nature. An irrationality.

Another form of demonic oppression in the Scripture is apostasy and doctrinal corruption. 1 Timothy 4:1 says, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Things, for example, like the Jim Jones incident, are a manifestation of demonic oppression upon a whole group. Persons who started out being Christians but who apostatized and wandered away into immorality and moral corruption, and then wound up being doctrinally corrupt as well.

A third area of oppression that the New Testament speaks about is an oppression that brings with it an indulging and sinful defiling behavior. Peter has a whole chapter on this (2 Peter 2). Persons who come involved in demonic oppression—through personal and continual involvement with sin or by family involvement in the occult—may be subject to special forms of demonic oppression.

We’ll talk about the cure in just a moment. We’re making some diagnoses now.

Let me spend a moment on demonic possession. The devil is the only world power whose major strategy is to convince people he doesn’t exist. One of the things that the western mind has not wanted to admit is the personal existence of an evil being called Satan and the demonic hosts with him. C. S. Lewis has, I think fittingly, pointed out that in western intellectual society, rather than demons possessing individuals, as they do in Eastern culture, they rather possess ideas in thought forms and advertising and media and the like. I think there’s a great deal of truth in that. One thing that always struck me, in regard to demon possession, is that since I was a kid, having spent several years in Tibet and seeing demon possessed people on a regular basis, I never had a problem later in my life, even when I was rebelling against God, with believing in evil spirits,

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because I knew—from first hand experience—that there was such a thing. You don't see that as much in our western society. I think we're seeing it more with the invasion of Eastern religions. Demon possession is a state in which one or more demonic spirits take control of the body and the personality of a human being. In the Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—which are the only Gospels that relate incidents of demon possession, there are seven specific cases of demon possession. And there are a number of summary accounts. That is, many persons coming to Him at one time.

In the Book of Acts, there is one specific incident of demon possession, two general accounts of demon possession and one encounter with exorcism that backfires. This is the summary of the data in the New Testament on demon possession. I tried to cull through this data and find some characteristics of demon possession. Again, I think it's important when we're discerning that we know what the Scriptures say about demon possession and we don't run off and begin identifying demons, without having a scriptural base. That's where I think many, in the charismatic world, who have sought to be demon diagnosticians, have gone astray by not focusing in on, first of all, what the Scripture itself says about demon possession.

III. Let's look at some characteristics in the New Testament in respect to possession.

A. One is physical manifestation. There is disordered behavior. That is occurring again and again in the accounts in Acts. Sometimes, the disordered behavior may not be as severe as in other occasions. Like, for example, at Capernaum, in Mark 1. A man in the synagogue pitches up out of his seat, in the middle of Jesus' sermon, and says, "What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God." But he is a man who is normal enough to at least be sitting in the audience. Not so the Gadarene demonic, who is out in the hills, living among the tombs, always crying out and bruising himself with stones. He had been bound with fetters and chains, but the

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chains he wrenched apart and the fetters he broke in pieces. He's not calm enough to ever come into a synagogue and sit down. Both, though, the Capernaum demoniac and the Gadarene demoniac have symptoms of disordered behavior. Although one may be more severe than the other.

On occasion, the physical manifestation of possession may be parallel with an illness, such as muteness or deafness, although that's not to say that muteness or deafness are evidences of possession. They can be parallel to possession. Jesus, on one occasion, cast an evil spirit out of a deaf man and cast an evil spirit out of a man who had muteness and deafness as well.

I would understand that, in that case, it was a person who was mute and deaf physically, who also was possessed by an evil spirit. When the spirit was cast out, Jesus simultaneously healed the individual.

B. Another characteristic of possession is self-destructive, and often violent, behavior. In the Capernaum demoniac, in Mark 1, the man shook violently. There was bizarre behavior in the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5. I have noted his living among the tombs and his crying out and bruising himself with stones. The demoniac boy who was brought to Christ threw himself to the ground frequently and the demon also threw him into the fire or into the water to kill him. He foamed at the mouth, he gnashed his teeth and his body became rigid. A physically violent, self-destructive behavior.

C. A third characteristic of demonic possession is that, when the evil spirit speaks, he differentiates himself from the person. He talks about "I" as opposed to "him" or "her." That's when the Gadarene demoniac runs up to Jesus and Jesus says, "What is your name?" He responds, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9). Later, the man is sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, there is no longer an evil force speaking through him.

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D. Fourthly, and a critically point, is that the demons always knew who Jesus was. No demon was ever in doubt about who Jesus was. In fact, Jesus would not accept the testimony of demons, so He would frequently tell them to be quiet when they would cry out, “We know who you are.” They would cry out, “Have You come to torment us before the time?” There was an instinctive reaction on the part of demons. They knew instinctively who Jesus was.

E. Fifthly, when there was an exit from a demon, most frequently it was a convulsive exit. The person was convulsed, then lapsed into a state of peace and rest.

The characteristics of Jesus dealing with demons are these.

1. He never told anyone they had a demon. He never went up to anybody and said, “You have a demon!” He never did that. The demon always manifested itself. If someone ever comes up to you and says, “I think you have a demon,” tell them to go away. They’re not a discerner. If you have a demon, it will manifest itself all by itself in the presence of spiritual power and authority. Jesus ordered demons to be silent. He never got into conversations with demons. He never made a tape recording of a conversation with a demon and passed it off as a tape-of-the-month kind of thing.

2. He ordered demons to be silent and he did not seek any information from them at all. They had to be silent in His presence.

3. He counseled prayer and faith as a means of exorcism. He told His disciples that, in order to exorcise demons—especially with the boy that had the evil spirit and was so critically possessed—they needed prayer and faith to be successful in that exorcism.

4. Fourthly Jesus commanded exit. As far as I can find, He never laid hands on a demon possessed person, although there’s no rule that you can’t lay hands on them. But He always ordered. He would touch the sick, but He always ordered the demons.

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5. And fifth, He always left the person whole. He never left them half-delivered. He never cast out one spirit and then came back later and found out He'd missed several. Everything left when He spoke.

Based on those observations, I'd like to give a word of counsel against, "charismatic demonologists." That is, people who go around under the guise of spirituality, identifying demons in the body of Christ. There are three unhealthy aspects to this practice of explaining personal behavior in terms of demonic possession when the demonic possession isn't there. If the demonic possession is there, It's going to manifest these attributes that are spoken of in Scripture. The unhealthy characteristics are these.

Identifying a person as having a demon when they don't begins to remove responsibility from them. They can say, "The devil made me do it. I'm not responsible for what I did. When it comes upon me, I have no resistance." It excuses personal responsibility.

The second thing it can do is ravage personhood. That is to say, when a person is told by another Christian, "You have a demon," what that can do, especially to a young Christian who hasn't had a great deal of exposure to the body of Christ, is absolutely ravage their heart and soul. It's like defacing their life, which may not be the case at all. It's a terrible thing to go around feeling "I have a demon."

I must tell you that I come out of a background where lots of things happen, some I'll never talk about. Some meetings I've been in, I recall the persons that were casting out evil spirits would say, "If you, in this service, are not being responsive to Christ when we cast the demon out of this person, it'll enter you." That would petrify me to death as a kid. These are meetings that my dad never conducted. He never conducted those kinds of meetings. But frequently, we'd be in places where that might happen.

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One thing Jesus never said was, “When I cast the spirit out of this person, it’s going to enter this person.” It doesn’t make sense to deliver one person and afflict another. But I didn’t know that at the time. I’d sometimes walk around wondering “Do I have an evil spirit?” That’s a devastating thing to walk around wondering in your heart, “Am I possessed?” If you’re possessed, people are going to know it. It won’t be a secret between it and you.

The third thing that this kind of teaching does is build unhealthy personalities. It does not concentrate people on working on their own sinful urges, confessing and working through those sinful urges, but allows them sort of a cop out. Jesus did not cast the demon of lust out of the woman taken in adultery (John 8). He did not cast the demon of unbelief out of Zacchaeus. He did not cast the demon of unbelief out of Peter, following his three-fold denial. Paul did not cast the demon of contentiousness out of Euodia or Syntyche, in Philippians 4, when they disagreed with one another. These are all matters of sinful human nature.

While I’m on charismatic demonologists, let me give a word of counsel about a personal prophecy thing that’s going around these days. People are going up to people and saying, “I have a personal prophecy for you.” The only emphasis on personal prophecy in the Scripture, in the Book of Acts especially, is when a prophecy is given and it’s in a group setting, not a one on one setting. It’s a group setting where other people are witnesses. The person already knows that information himself and also has the right, as in the case of the apostle Paul, to not accept that word, as Paul did not accept the word from some brethren who were at Tyre who warned him not to go to Jerusalem. So if someone comes up to you and says, “I have a personal prophecy.” Ask them to give that prophecy before a group of people who can judge it. Also, make sure that it agrees with your own spirit. If it doesn’t, you should refuse it.

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There is a difference between encouraging a person and going up and saying, “I know what the future is for you. On such and such a day, you’re going to do such and such.” Beware of that kind of thing. It is very akin to the spirit, which the Scripture condemns, of fortune-telling and looking into the future in a wrongful manner.

How do we become spiritually whole? How do we discern how to become spiritually whole?

When a person is demon possessed, the only way to spiritual wholeness is through exorcism, through the evil spirit being cast out. No other thing will work in demon possession. Nothing else will work. It must be exorcism. Since demon possession in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts does not occur at the frequency as healing occurs, one therefore must not look at demon possession as something which is everywhere, rampant, and prevalent. It occurs, yes. It needs to be exorcised, yes. It can be dealt with in no other way.

Demonic oppression. How is demonic oppression dealt with? When the oppression is due to sin, personal sin and the involvement with the occult, that sin or the involvement with the occult must be confessed, it must be repented of and it must be put away. If the oppression occurs because we are being especially and uniquely oppressed, because of our commitment to Jesus Christ, then what is needed is a confession in the strong name of Jesus and the pleading of His blood.

My mother, in her first year as a missionary, was put up in a room where there were two large idols, larger than life size. They were over 6-feet tall. She and her sister put their cots down in between the idols, because there was no other space in the room. They threw a sheet over the idols. She didn’t have much respect for them, but she couldn’t move them. They were too big and she had to sleep there that night. In the middle of the night, she woke up and her bed was floating in the air. She sensed tremendous demonic oppression, so thick that to even try to speak

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the name of Jesus was like trying to speak through cotton in her mouth. I had the same experience on Tibetan monastery grounds when I was a kid. All night long, the whole family was kept awake. It was the annual festival of the butter gods. The night before, the dance to the lord of hell and death. Just incredible sort of oppression, in which you can barely stammer out the name of Jesus the spiritual force is so strong. But the name of Jesus could always be gotten out. And the blood of Jesus always avails and the oppression leaves. In some cases, it may require binding the evil spirit. When it's due to our own responsibility of sins or to the occult, it must be confessed and repented of and laid away. If it's simply come because we're involved in doing the work of Christ, we are to confess the strong name of Jesus and remind the demonic force of the power of Christ, remind them of the cross and the fact that they were defeated there, remind them of the empty tomb and the risen Christ.

What about temptation from a demonic origin? How do we discern how to deal with it? Like the Lord, we're to use the Word of God, especially when we sense temptation coming at us from the outside. Like the Lord, we need to quote the Scripture. We need to resist. James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

What about temptation from our sinful, fallen human nature? That's the most difficult one for most of us to deal with. I have some steps here: recognizing the sinful impulse, removing yourself from the temptation-producing environment, confessing the sinful desire, sharing your struggle with other Christians, seeking thought patterns which are pure and wholesome, living in the grace of God.

I realize that, as I look at that list, it can sort of be a laundry list. I was a little bit bothered by putting it there. Yet I know that these are the steps involved in dealing with sinful human nature.

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I want to focus on the last—living in the grace of God. When the other steps have been completed—we have repented and confessed—we always must recognize that we, as children of God, live in the family of God and live by the grace of God.

What did the Lord mean, “Except we become as children.” Then, for the first time, it dawned on me what it meant. My little girl had two ways of knowing God and two ways of knowing me. If you were to ask her how tall her father was when he was three, she would not have known. If you were to ask her what a doctorate degree was, she wouldn’t have really known. If you were to ask her what marriage was, she didn’t know. She had no concept of marriage because she had no concept of ever having been begun herself. So if you were to base her knowledge of me on the basis of if she knew how tall I was, what a doctorate degree was, and what marriage was, or any other item of information about me, she’d flunk the test. But she knew me a lot better than people who knew that information about me. There are two ways of knowing. There’s the head way—the knowledge way, the information way. And there’s the heart way the relational way. A knowing which knows without possessing a lot of information.

That’s the way we relate to God as well. If you wait to come to God until you know all there is about Him, you’ll never know Him, because you can only come by being born into the kingdom of God and knowing Him relationally. When you know Him relationally, then you can begin to grow in information.

The point that I’m making is that to be in the family of God, means, literally, to be born into a family. It is the security of that relationship. It is walking with God in the security of that relationship. It is wrestling with the sinful human nature, no longer as an outsider but now as a member of the family in whom Christ is dwelling and seeking to win His war within us. When we fail or fall short of the glory of God and the grace of God, we have the recourse of coming to

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Him and living once more in His grace and treasuring once more the relationship that we enjoy in Christ.

I pray that you'll discern that. The basic discernment of all is that you will discern who Jesus Christ is. Have you confessed that He comes from God? Or are you still at the point of not deciding whether He speaks as a man or by a demonic voice. The base discernment is, who is Jesus? Then, to discern how the Spirit of God comforts us and assures us of His life in us, even when we fail. To discern those things is really at the heart of all discernment.

Closing Prayer

Our gracious Father, we come to You today with thanksgiving in our heart that You have delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and have brought us into the kingdom of the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. I pray, Lord Jesus, for each person now in this room, that You, in the Spirit, can see through them. You know who is facing special oppression in their life or temptation, which is of evil origin. Or temptation from their own sinful, fallen human nature. We remind ourselves that "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We remind ourselves of Your words—"I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We remind ourselves of Your promise—"If the Son of Man sets you free you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). We thank You for the promise of Your life entering ours and for the presence of Your power in us. We bless Your name. And we pray that this word will strengthen Your people. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.