

Spiritual Mixture in Ministry

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things, hold fast what is good.” –1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

Every Christian who wants to serve God needs to be a channel of the Holy Spirit. In our lives, through our words, and in every form of ministry we need the Holy Spirit's anointing to be effective. This is so basic to our calling that even the word *Christian* means that we are *disciples of "The Anointed One."*

However, as we grow in Christ we can begin to see that there can be different sources of spiritual power used not just by evil persons, but also by well-intentioned Christians. And unless we can learn when spiritual mixture is operating we will find that this mixture can create much confusion and trouble.

This is one major reason why some Christians reject spiritual manifestations. They have seen these things abused by those who have proclaimed foolish prophecies or have manipulated other Christians through attempted spiritual ministries. For these reasons many churches reject and even despise prophecy along with other spiritual manifestations, even though 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 clearly tells us not to do that. Yet while this scripture portion begins by telling us *"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies,"* it also goes on to tell us in verse 21 to *"Test all things, hold fast what is good."* If we do not properly test spiritual manifestations in order to reject that which is misguided or false, then the negative results often produced by this mixture can be distasteful and even alarming to many sincere Christians.

This is why some Christians quench spiritual manifestations and despise prophesy. It is not necessarily because they are carnal or hardhearted towards the Holy Spirit- sometimes it is because they desire a purity and accuracy in ministry that is lacking among those who attempt to function in these Pentecostal ministries! This does not mean that we should reject scriptural ministries because they are sometimes abused, but we can certainly understand how this abuse can cause some people to become overly cautious.

THREE SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL ANOINTINGS

Before we can test spiritual manifestations and prophecies it is important to understand the different sources that can produce these effects. The scriptures teach us that there are three different types of spirits that can function through a ministry. These are: 1) the Holy Spirit, 2) demonic spirits, and also 3) the human spirit.

When the Holy Spirit flows through a person's spirit and is released there will be an impartation of godly ministry. For example, this is how a true prophet functions. Second Peter 1:21 tells us that the prophecies of Scripture were brought forth when *"holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*

However, it is also possible for an evil spirit to work through a person's life. This is how a false prophet functions. For example, we can read in 2 Chronicles 18 of when Zedekiah and the 400 prophets of wicked King Ahab prophesied by the anointing of a lying spirit. In Acts 16:16-18 we can also read about the slave girl at Philippi who prophesied by the power of a spirit of divination. Evil spirits anointed these false prophets to have power in their "ministry" but it brought forth deception, evil, and death.

There is yet a third spiritual source that can release ministry. This does not come from the Holy Spirit or evil spirits, but from the release of the human spirit of the person who is attempting to minister. This

can unintentionally happen when Christians and ministers try to be channels of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit does not choose to move and empower their ministry, the minister may try to “stir things up” or “get things moving” by their own human strength. This can be released from a person’s spirit, for part of our human nature is that we are each comprised of spirit, soul, and body (see 1 Thess.5:23). From their own heart (or spirit) a person can seek to release ministry- although of course the strength and wisdom of our own human spirit is very inferior to the working of the Holy Spirit!

As a scriptural example of this, we find that foolish prophets try to function by the power of their own spirit. The Lord told Ezekiel, *“Say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the Lord!’ Thus says the Lord God: ‘Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!’”* Here we see a group of prophets who were not categorized as true or false, but as *foolish*. They did not function in their attempted ministries by the Holy Spirit, or by a demonic spirit, but instead by the leading of their own human spirit.

A few modern-day illustrations can help us to understand how this can operate. One example would be when a group of young ladies have been praying that God will show them their future marriage partners. If the Holy Spirit does not give them a revelation, there are times when they, from the motivation of their own heart or human spirit, will feel moved about someone. Perhaps a burden grows in their heart that they mistake for the burden of the Holy Spirit, or perhaps they have a natural dream about a young man that they foolishly attribute to be a revelation from God. Sometimes two or three ladies each receive a “word from the Lord” that they will marry the same man! Now, probably none of them were deceived by evil spirits. Yet at the most, only one of these ladies had received a true revelation from the Holy Spirit. The others were foolishly misled by their own hearts into believing that they had a prophetic word from the Lord.

Other topics which Christians commonly prophesy about out of their own human spirit are that someone will become blessed with wealth, be elected or promoted to high position, or be miraculously healed. While the Lord can prophetically declare any of these things and bring them to pass, we need to be careful that the Holy Spirit is motivating a true prophecy and that we are not simply declaring only our own human hopes and dreams. This is because prophetic declarations and spiritual ministries can create powerful blessings when they are released by the Holy Spirit, but they can also discredit a ministry and cause much heartache and disappointment if they are only the product of a person’s human hopes.

Another way in which the human spirit can seek to create spiritual manifestations can be shown by something I observed some years ago when I was attending a convention. The pastor of a large church had come from another nation to conduct a large gathering. After the message this pastor invited the local delegates up to the front so that he could bless them with personal ministry. When they had lined up in front, the pastor went down the line and blew into each of their faces. However, nothing visible happened to any of the delegates.

Then the visiting pastor lined up on the platform a row of people who had come with him from his own church. While people waited behind them to catch them, the pastor went down the line and blew into each of their faces. This time, when he blew upon his own church members, they each fell over backwards.

After seemingly demonstrating what should be the result of his “ministry,” the pastor then returned to the original line of local delegates. This time as he blew upon them they also fell over backwards. However, this new response of the local Christians was not a true reaction to the release of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was a learned response or ritual that the pastor had taught them. Out of his own spirit the pastor may have wanted to give them a good spiritual blessing, or perhaps from the pride of his heart he may have wanted to demonstrate to everyone that he was a mighty anointed man of God. Whatever his human motives may have been, I felt that this was not true ministry by the Holy

Spirit, or false ministry by an evil spirit- it was foolish ministry produced by the human spirit of this pastor.

I have seen this same dynamic at work in many similar ways over the years. While we should pray for and rejoice when the power of the Holy Spirit is revealed, it is easy to develop a ritual of what should happen when we seek to release the moving of the Holy Spirit. I have seen churches that have been seemingly trained that when the preacher is concluding his message, the people should always start whimpering and crying. Other groups have been taught that if everyone starts laughing then the Holy Spirit is moving. Some churches are taught that everyone should fall over backwards every time they are prayed for- and if they don't, the person praying for them might help by pushing them over! While weeping, laughing, and falling over as dead are all scriptural manifestations of how the Holy Spirit can work, unless He comes and moves among us all these activities can degenerate into merely becoming dead rituals. And if the Holy Spirit is not moving but the people expect some action, it can be a temptation for the leaders to act as though God is moving in power while it is only their human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, that is orchestrating the show.

SPIRITUAL MIXTURE IN A CHRISTIAN'S MINISTRY

What some Christians find difficult to understand is how a Christian can at times be a channel of any of these three spiritual forces. Can a Christian be motivated or deceived by his human spirit or by a demonic spirit into flowing in wrong areas of spiritual declaration or impartation? Some people will say "no," that since a Christian has the Holy Spirit he cannot be spiritually deceived or wrongly motivated.

However, the Bible is full of warnings that we need to keep ourselves from deception and its resultant mixture. This deception can first come from our own human heart, or spirit. Obadiah 3 said that "*the pride of your heart has deceived you,*" while Jeremiah warned that "*the heart is deceitful above all things,*" Jer.18:9. A New Testament example of this is when Peter zealously declared at the Last Supper that he would never deny Christ, only to find to his shame that he denied Christ that very night. In a similar way we can declare foolish prophecies out of our own human heart, while later finding out that the Holy Spirit may choose not to work or enable us to fulfill that zealous prophecy.

Another area that can bring spiritual deception is through demonic spirits. Christ and the apostles clearly warn us that we must keep ourselves from false ministers and satanic deception, even moreso just before the Second Coming of Christ (see 2 Cor.12:3-4 & 13-15, 1 Jn.4:1, Mat.24:4,5,11, & 24, and 2 Thess.2:1-12). An example of how an evil spirit can deceive a believer can also be seen in Peter's life from Matthew 16:17 & 23. A short time after Jesus commended Peter for receiving a revelation from God, the Lord then rebuked him for speaking the words of Satan. And if the Apostle Peter could be satanically deceived, it can also be a danger for us!

The Scriptures clearly show that there can be many attitudes at work in a person's spirit or heart. Some of these characteristics include being contrite and humble (Is.57:15), meek and quiet (1 Pet.3:4), guileless (Ps.32:2), refreshed (1 Cor.16:18), troubled, (Jn.13:21), wounded (Prov. 18:14), evil (Jer.3:17), hardened (Mk.6:52), adulterous (Ezek.6:9), deceived (Is.44:20), foolish (Rom.1:21), quickly angered (Eccles.7:9), and unrepentant (Rom.2:5).

These varying attitudes of heart can cause us to be influenced by, and then become channels of, the Holy Spirit or of evil spirits. And even when neither of these supernatural anointings are upon someone, that person can still influence or manipulate others by the strength of their own human spirit. That is why the Scriptures encourage us that if we want to become wise we should associate ourselves with wise people and avoid having foolish friends, Prov.13:20. In a similar way Proverbs 22:24-5 says do not associate with angry people because you may become like them!

For these reasons we need to protect the spiritual condition of our heart. As the Scriptures exhort, *“Guard yourself in your spirit,”* Mal.2:15-16 NIV, and *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life,”* Prov.4:23. As we keep our own heart pure that will help insure that our ministry to others will also remain pure.

HOW CAN WE DISCERN SPIRITUAL MIXTURE IN MINISTRY?

The first step towards discerning spiritual mixture is to understand that we are to spiritually test all things. First Thessalonians 5:21 tells us to *“Test all things, hold fast what is good.”* First John 4:1 also declares, *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God.”* Hebrews 5:14 further tells us that spiritually mature Christians are *“those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

Some Christians do not consider it correct that they should test or judge spiritual things. One reason is that they do not feel that they are spiritually mature enough. Yet Hebrews 5:14 tells us that one way to become mature is to exercise discernment. Use what discernment you have, and just like exercising a muscle, it will become stronger. This does not mean that a young Christian should try to see a demon hiding behind every chair! However, we can always pray about every spiritual manifestation we see. We can search the scriptures to gain wisdom, and talk with more mature Christians to learn from their discernment.

Other Christians sometimes are relectant to test or judge spiritual things because of the teaching of Christ when He said, *“Judge not, that you be not judged,”* Mt. 7:1. While it is true that we are not to condemnably judge people, yet the word of God also teaches us that *“he who is spiritual judges all things,”* 1 Cor.2:15. To mature spiritually and become leaders of the flock of God we must grow in discernment. A good pastor must learn how to protect his “sheep” from poisonous food (wrong doctrines) and wild beasts (evil spirits) while leading them to the water of the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:11-14 we are told that Christ has placed ministries in the body of Christ to help the church to mature, *“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men.”* The word *wind* in this scripture can also be translated as *spirit*. Now when we look at the possible spiritual sources of these winds of doctrine, it is clear that the wind of the Holy Spirit is not being referred to. These doctrines instead could be anointed by satan, who Paul had called *“the prince of the power of the air”* two chapters earlier in Ephesians 2:2. These winds of doctrine could also merely be unbalanced teachings wrongly promoted by the human spirit of men, as the phrase *“by the trickery of men”* could suggest. Yet what is very clear is that we need to learn not to be carried about by every wind (or spirit) if we want to spiritually mature. We do not want to be like a ship which is moved by every wind, yet only wanders and never arrives at its destination. We want to become like a skilled pilot who knows how to navigate against the winds to bring the ship (the church) to its desired goal of maturity and victory.

The next step towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we must learn to judge spiritual ministry by its fruit, not its gifts. In Matthew 7:15-17 the Lord Jesus told us that we will know false prophets by their bad fruit. A good ministry which releases the Holy Spirit will produce good fruit, while those who minister from only the human spirit or from demonic spirits will bear bad fruit such as confusion, division, oppression, and sin. So we need to first look at the lives of the ones who are ministering- are they righteous, loving, and properly submitted in the body of Christ? Are their finances and family in good order? Then we should also check out the fruit of their ministry. What has been the result of their ministry in their own local church? Is their preaching doctrinally sound? When they travel to other places does their ministry leave a lasting blessing, or problems?

It is very important that we judge ministers by their fruit rather than gifts because some spiritually gifted people may seem to have very impressive ministries. But gifts do not tell us about the person

who *has* them as much as the gifts tell us about the person who *gave* them! Spiritual gifts tell us about the goodness of the God who gave them, whereas the fruit that is grown from the person's life tells us about the goodness (or evil) of their own personal character. If a person's character is flawed or sinful, no matter how impressive their giftings may seem they will release spiritual mixture through their ministry. In the Scriptures we find powerful prophetic giftings and anointings in men like King Saul, Balaam, and Samson, yet we also find character deficiencies that were dangerous or even deadly.

In Matthew 7:21-23 The Lord Jesus spoke about a large group of many people who prophesied, cast out demons, and worked many miracles. However, on Judgment Day, the Lord will tell them *"I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* Here we see that the Lord judges by character, not giftings, and if we want to be like Christ then we should do the same.

However, judging the fruit of a ministry will not always give us our needed help towards discerning spiritual mixture. This is because it can often take a long time for fruit to grow and become observable. So a third help towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we must become sensitive to the witness of the Holy Spirit within our heart. Colossians 3:15 tells us, *"let the peace of God rule in your hearts."* The word translated here as *rule* can also be translated as an *umpire* or *referee*. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in the heart of every born-again believer, is to act as an umpire or referee. And how does an umpire function? While the sports event is being played properly, the umpire will be silent as he oversees the game. Yet when a rule is broken, the umpire will disturb and stop the game. He will blow a whistle, raise a card, or throw a flag. When he interrupts everything stops while the umpire explains what went wrong and then corrects it. After this the game can again proceed as long as the umpire remains quiet.

In a similar way the Holy Spirit gives us peace in our heart as long as everything is correctly proceeding. But if something goes wrong- if an evil spirit is manifested, or if someone wrongly ministers out of their human spirit without the release of the Holy Spirit- then the Holy Spirit removes His peace in our heart. This troubling of our spirit is to tell us that something is wrong! And if we will be sensitive to this guidance, find out what went wrong, and correct things, then the Holy Spirit will again fill our heart with peace.

An illustration of this can be seen in Acts 16 from when Paul and his team were evangelizing the city of Philippi. We read in verses 16-18, *"Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.' And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour."*

The message that this girl prophesied seemed to be very accurate, and Paul and his evangelistic group could have welcomed the good advertising. But while everything on the natural level seemed good, we see that Paul began functioning on a different level. His spirit was troubled by what this girl was saying. The Holy Spirit had removed His peace from Paul's heart and warned him that something was wrong. It took Paul *"many days"* before he fully understood and dealt with the problem, but when he did, the deliverance of the girl from that evil spirit became a turning point towards establishing a church in that city. It especially removed the danger that this girl and her counterfeit gifting might have been welcomed into the young church, which after the departure of Paul could have caused much destruction.

Years ago the Lord taught me a similar lesson on how the witness of the Holy Spirit's peace can be useful in detecting spiritual mixture. I was invited to preach at a church where the pastor was boasting that one of the church members was a great prophetess. She would write down prophecies, have

someone put it in their bank lock box, and then after a certain time have them unlock their box and read the prophecy after it had just been fulfilled. After hearing this I was interested in meeting this gifted person so I talked with her after the service.

From our conversation I could tell that she was a spiritual woman, yet the Holy Spirit within me was very troubled. I felt that something about this woman was very wrong. Her words all seemed spiritual, and her prophetic accuracy was proven- but the Holy Spirit was “blowing the whistle” and saying that something was wrong! So as we were talking, I began praying in my heart, and then silently from my heart commanded the evil spirit in the name of Jesus to reveal himself. Just then she changed what she was talking about, and began to speak about her late husband who had died about six months earlier. She said that she went to his grave every day, where she would talk to him and then he would talk back to her! At that moment the Holy Spirit witnessed in my heart that the evil spirit at work in her “ministry” had just been revealed, and that she was a spiritist medium, not a prophetess of the Holy Spirit. Yet while I was warned and then protected myself against her spiritual mixture, the pastor did not listen to several warnings about her. The result was that this lady later caused great damage in the church.

A fourth step towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we should let the spiritual leaders involved in the situation give their consensus, or their collective discernment, about the spiritual manifestation that is being examined. In 1 Corinthians 14:29 Paul wrote, *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge,”* while Proverbs 24:6 tells us, *“in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”* If a prophecy or spiritual manifestation is released in a service it is the responsibility of the leaders there to approve or question its source and accuracy. This could take place by the silent approval of the leaders, or by their saying “amen” or “praise the Lord.” A mild questioning of the situation could be done by having the leaders check with each other and then say into the microphone “let us pray about that” or “perhaps that is from the Lord.” If the leaders feel very troubled about a spiritual manifestation that occurred, they might steer the service into a different direction and then later (perhaps privately) have a counseling or a deliverance session with the person who released the manifestation.

A fifth help towards discerning spiritual mixture is the Holy Spirit’s gift of the discerning of spirits (see 1 Cor. 12:10-11). This is a charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some, whereby they can discern what is the source behind a spiritual manifestation. While that gift is operating a person can see, hear, feel, smell or taste something that will reveal the spiritual source that is at work in a situation. Perhaps a dream or vision may visually reveal a spiritual power at work in a situation (see 2 Chron.18:18-22 & Zech.4). Perhaps they will audibly hear a word from the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit, or what a person is silently saying in their human spirit, Mk.2:6-8. Sometimes people can feel the hair on the back of their head stand up when an evil spirit is present, as in Job.4:15, or they will taste or smell something very bad or sulfurous. On other occasions people have tasted or smelled something wonderful, which has indicated the work of God, Ps.34:8, Heb.6:4, & Ps. 141:2. These revelations can come through having the gift of the discerning of spirits anoint a person’s natural five senses to give them supernatural perception.

Many times the gift of the discerning of spirits has helped me to understand the spiritual powers that are at work behind different situations. At times I have had that gift function in my own life, or I have received a revelation from someone else that I know has that spiritual gift. Sometimes the Holy Spirit has been discerned at work like a dove, fire, or wind. At other times angels or demons have been seen. Occasionally my human spirit will directly hear what another person is silently saying in their heart. Each of these times that I have been made aware of the spiritual forces at work in a situation it has helped me to be much more effective in ministry- whether to help release the work of the Holy Spirit, hinder the works of demons, or help correct the problems in a person’s heart.

OUR NEED FOR BALANCE

As we first mentioned, while we seek to enter into pure ministries of spiritual power it is important that we remain balanced. A lack of balance causes some to swing off on the wrong side of having spiritual mixture in their attempted ministries because they do not properly judge their spiritual source. Yet the opposite imbalance causes others to reject all spiritual manifestations and prophecies because they are afraid of mixture! People on both sides of this balance are often sincere Christians, but it is only as we mature that we will be able to work together with each other and with the Holy Spirit to accomplish all of God's great plans for His church.

Growing in discernment does not mean that we should be harshly judgmental of other Christians, or that we should always be looking for demons and holding deliverance services. Just as when Elisha's servant was afraid as he saw that the enemy had surrounded them, we need instead to have Elisha's balanced vision and faith. Elisha knew that his angelic reinforcements were much greater than the enemy, and that in quiet confidence he could see God's power bring the victory, 2 Kings 6:14-23. We are on the victor's side! And as we fully follow our triumphant Lord He will lead us into a spiritual life and ministry that will help build a mature, victorious church- a church that even the gates of hell will not be able to overcome!