

DISCERNMENT

Biblical Tests for Spiritual Experiences



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CHURCH

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Biblical Tests for Spiritual Experiences

1 John 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22; Hebrews 5:14; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Matthew 7:15–23

The Holy Ghost will never require us to abandon the Word of God in order to experience the power of God.

INTRODUCTION

Not Everything Spiritual Comes From God

We live in a time when people are increasingly fascinated by spiritual experiences.

People speak about dreams, visions, prophecies, supernatural encounters, angelic visitations, miraculous signs, and personal revelations.

Some claim that God speaks directly to them about nearly every decision they make.

Others claim special spiritual authority because of experiences they have had.

Still others measure the presence of God by the emotional intensity of a church service.

But there is an important question that every Christian must learn to answer:

How do we know whether a spiritual experience genuinely comes from God?

The Bible does not teach us to accept every spiritual claim simply because someone says it is from God.

Neither does Scripture teach us to reject every unusual experience because we cannot immediately explain it.

Instead, the Bible commands us to exercise spiritual discernment.

1 John 4:1 (KJV)

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

Notice that John does not say we should refuse to believe in spiritual experiences.

He tells us to test them.

This instruction was written to believers who understood that God works supernaturally.

The early church experienced miracles, healings, spiritual gifts, angelic deliverances, visions, and direct manifestations of the Holy Ghost.

Yet those same believers were warned that not every spiritual manifestation was from God.

The existence of the genuine makes discernment necessary, not unnecessary, because the devil will try to imitate the things of God.

In our previous lesson last week, Emotionalism vs. Genuine Revival, we examined the difference between emotional excitement and genuine spiritual transformation.

We established that emotions are not inherently wrong.

God created us with emotions.

Joy, sorrow, conviction, gratitude, reverence, and even fear can accompany genuine encounters with God.

However, emotional intensity does not establish spiritual authenticity.

A person may weep without repenting.

A person may shout without surrendering.

A person may feel deeply moved without experiencing lasting spiritual change.

And a person may genuinely encounter God without displaying the emotional responses that others expect.

So we must learn to evaluate spiritual experiences by something more dependable than feelings.

That standard is the Word of God.

1 — THE BIBLICAL COMMAND TO TEST SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 (KJV)

“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

These verses establish a remarkable balance.

Paul gives three instructions that must be understood together.

1. Do not quench the Spirit.
2. Do not despise prophecies.
3. Prove all things.

The word translated prove carries the meaning of examining or testing something to determine its genuineness.

Paul is not encouraging believers to become suspicious of everything spiritual.

He is teaching us to distinguish between what genuinely comes from God and what does not.

Two dangerous extremes

I - Accepting everything

Some believers assume that if something happens in a church service, it must be from God.

- If someone falls to the floor, it must be God.
- If someone begins shaking, it must be God.
- If someone speaks with great authority, it must be God.
- If someone claims to have received a revelation, it must be God.

But none of these outward manifestations, by themselves, establishes divine origin.

We must be careful not to confuse an unusual experience with a genuine work of the Holy Ghost.

II - Rejecting everything

Other believers become so concerned about deception that they begin rejecting every unusual spiritual experience.

- They become uncomfortable with the gifts of the Spirit.
- They question every emotional response.
- They assume that anything they have not personally experienced must be false.

But Paul specifically warned against quenching the Spirit.

The solution to spiritual deception is not spiritual unbelief.

The solution is biblical discernment.

We should be open to everything God genuinely desires to do while refusing to accept anything that contradicts His Word.

Practical application

Suppose someone visits our church and begins speaking prophetically.

Should we automatically accept everything they say? No.

Should we immediately assume they are false? No.

We should examine the message, its content, its purpose, and its agreement with Scripture.

This is exactly what Paul instructed the Corinthian church to do.

1 Corinthians 14:29 (KJV)

“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.”

Even prophetic utterances in the apostolic church were subject to examination.

If spiritual manifestations were tested in the first-century church, why should they be exempt from examination today?

2 — THE TEST OF SCRIPTURAL AGREEMENT

Isaiah 8:20 (KJV)

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The first and most important test of any spiritual experience is whether it agrees with the revealed Word of God.

God does not contradict Himself.

The Holy Ghost inspired the Scriptures.

Therefore, the Holy Ghost will not lead believers into teachings or practices that contradict those Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (KJV)

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Notice the purposes of Scripture.

- It teaches us what is right.
- It exposes what is wrong.
- It corrects our understanding.
- It instructs us in righteous living.

Scripture provides the standard by which our beliefs, conduct, and spiritual experiences must be examined.

Experiences do not establish doctrine

This is especially important in Pentecostal churches.

- We believe in the supernatural operation of God.
- We believe in divine healing.
- We believe in the gifts of the Spirit.
- We believe that God can communicate through dreams and visions.

But we do not establish doctrine merely because someone reports an experience.

Doctrine must come from Scripture.

Galatians 1:8 (KJV)

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

Paul establishes a very serious principle.

Even an extraordinary supernatural appearance cannot authorize a different gospel.

Imagine someone saying:

“An angel appeared to me and told me that baptism in Jesus' name is no longer necessary.”

Would the appearance of an angel make that teaching true?

Absolutely not.

The gospel cannot be changed by a supernatural claim.

The difference between revelation and interpretation

Here is something we must understand.

A person may have a genuine experience but misunderstand what that experience means.

For example, someone may experience a powerful sense of God's presence during prayer.

That experience may be genuine.

But suppose the person then concludes that God has appointed them to a position of authority over the entire congregation.

That conclusion does not automatically follow from the experience.

The experience and its interpretation are two different matters.

A person may correctly recognize that God is dealing with them while incorrectly interpreting what God desires them to do.

We must distinguish between:

- What actually happened.
- What the person believes happened.
- What the person believes the experience means.
- What Scripture establishes concerning the matter.

These are not always the same thing.

Teaching principle: No spiritual experience gives anyone permission to disregard the written Word of God.

3 — THE TEST OF JESUS CHRIST

John 16:13–14 (KJV)

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Jesus explained that the Spirit of truth would guide believers into truth and glorify Him.

This provides another important test.

Does the experience direct attention toward Jesus Christ, or does it exalt the individual claiming the experience?

The genuine operation of the Holy Ghost does not exist to make spiritual celebrities.

It exists to reveal Jesus Christ, strengthen His church, and accomplish His purposes.

The identity of Jesus Christ matters

1 John 4:2–3

John specifically connected the testing of spirits with the confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh.

This was not simply a test of whether someone used the name Jesus.

It concerned the truth of who Jesus Christ is.

From our Apostolic understanding, Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the one eternal God in genuine humanity.

Colossians 2:9 (KJV)

“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

The Holy Ghost will never lead someone to deny the biblical identity of Jesus Christ or diminish His saving work.

A supposed revelation that contradicts the truth of Jesus Christ cannot be accepted as coming from God.

When the messenger becomes the center

Consider a minister who continually emphasizes his own supernatural experiences.

He speaks about the angels he has seen.

He describes visions that supposedly establish his authority.

He claims that God reveals things to him that ordinary Christians cannot understand.

Eventually, the congregation becomes more fascinated with the minister than with Jesus Christ.

That should concern us.

The apostolic ministry directed people toward Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:5 (KJV)

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.”

A genuine minister is not the object of the church's faith.

Jesus Christ is.

Spiritual experiences that consistently elevate the messenger above the message should be carefully examined.

4 — THE TEST OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT

Matthew 7:15–16 (KJV)

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

Jesus did not tell us to identify false prophets merely by examining their public demonstrations.

He told us to examine their fruit.

Fruit is the visible result of what is growing within a person's life.

It develops over time.

This is why a person's conduct over months and years may reveal more about their spiritual condition than an impressive moment in a church service.

Gifts and fruit are not the same thing

1 Corinthians 1:7

Paul acknowledged that the Corinthian church was not lacking in spiritual gifts. Yet in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, he confronted their carnality, envy, strife, and divisions.

Think about that.

A congregation could experience spiritual gifts and still have serious problems with spiritual maturity.

Therefore, we must not assume that a person is spiritually mature simply because they have been used in a spiritual gift.

The gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit serve different purposes.

Spiritual gifts are given for the benefit and edification of the body.

Spiritual fruit reveals the character being developed in a believer's life.

Galatians 5:22–23 (KJV)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Notice that these qualities concern character.

They describe how a person lives and treats others.

A person may speak powerfully in public but behave cruelly in private.

A person may claim prophetic insight while demonstrating pride and an unwillingness to accept correction.

A person may appear deeply spiritual while manipulating people for personal gain.

These contradictions should not be ignored.

Jesus' warning about supernatural works

Matthew 7:22–23 (KJV)

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

These are sobering words.

Jesus warned that claims of extraordinary spiritual activity do not automatically establish a person's relationship with Him.

We should not build our confidence in someone's ministry solely upon reports of miracles, prophecies, or supernatural experiences.

We must examine the fruit of their life and the truth of their teaching.

An impressive ministry is not a substitute for godly character.

5 — THE TEST OF ORDER AND EDIFICATION

1 Corinthians 14:26 (KJV)

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”

Paul addressed a congregation where spiritual gifts were operating.

He did not instruct them to eliminate the gifts.

He taught them how the gifts should function within the assembled church.

The purpose was edification.

That means building up and strengthening the body of Christ.

Spiritual liberty does not eliminate spiritual responsibility

Sometimes people confuse spiritual liberty with the absence of order.

They assume that if the Holy Ghost is moving, no one should exercise judgment or direction.

But Paul taught otherwise.

1 Corinthians 14:32–33 (KJV)

“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”

Notice that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

Paul did not teach that a person operating in a spiritual gift loses all ability to exercise self-control.

A person cannot simply excuse disorder by declaring, “I couldn't help myself; the Spirit made me do it.”

The biblical operation of spiritual gifts includes responsibility.

1 Corinthians 14:40 (KJV)

“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

Order is not the enemy of revival.

Biblical order provides an environment where the congregation can be strengthened rather than confused.

Pastoral responsibility

Pastors are responsible for protecting and feeding the flock.

That responsibility includes providing biblical direction when spiritual manifestations occur.

A pastor who asks someone to wait, clarify a message, or refrain from disrupting a service is not necessarily quenching the Spirit.

He may be fulfilling his responsibility to maintain biblical order.

At the same time, pastoral oversight must never become an excuse to suppress genuine spiritual gifts simply because they are inconvenient or unfamiliar.

The goal is neither control for its own sake nor uncontrolled expression. The goal is biblical edification.

6 — THE TEST OF HUMILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1 Peter 5:5 (KJV)

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

Humility is one of the most important qualities in spiritual maturity.

A person who genuinely desires to follow God should be willing to examine their understanding.

This does not mean that every criticism is correct.

It means that no one should consider themselves beyond correction.

Spiritual experiences do not place anyone above Scripture

Suppose someone claims that God has given them a special revelation.

When questioned, they respond:

“You cannot question me because God speaks directly to me.”

That response should concern us.

The apostles themselves taught believers to examine spiritual claims.

Acts 17:11 (KJV)

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

The Bereans were commended for examining what they heard.

They did not reject Paul's message simply because it was new to them.

But neither did they abandon biblical examination because the messenger was an apostle.

They searched the Scriptures.

Legitimate authority and spiritual manipulation

Scripture teaches the importance of pastoral leadership.

Hebrews 13:17

Pastors watch for souls and must give account for their ministry.

However, pastoral authority is not unlimited personal authority.

Pastors themselves remain accountable to Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

1 Peter 5:2–3

Peter instructed elders to shepherd God's flock willingly and faithfully, not as lords over God's heritage, but as examples to the flock.

Biblical authority exists to serve and protect the church.

It is not a license to manipulate believers.

A healthy congregation should be able to respect pastoral leadership while also being firmly grounded in Scripture.

Submission to biblical leadership does not require surrendering personal responsibility to know and obey God's Word.

7 — WHEN THE SUPERNATURAL IS NOT FROM GOD

Matthew 24:24 (KJV)

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

Jesus warned that signs and wonders could be associated with deception.

Therefore, the existence of an extraordinary event does not automatically prove that God authorized the person or message associated with it.

The example of Pharaoh's magicians

Exodus 7:10–12

When Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh, Aaron cast down his rod, and it became a serpent.

The Egyptian magicians also produced a similar sign through their enchantments.

But Aaron's rod swallowed their rods.

The passage demonstrates that an impressive sign, by itself, was not sufficient to establish that someone represented the true God.

The young woman in Philippi

Acts 16:16–18

Paul encountered a young woman described as having a spirit of divination.

She followed Paul and his companions, announcing that they were servants of the most high God who proclaimed the way of salvation.

Her words sounded favorable.

But Paul eventually commanded the spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ.

This account teaches us something important.

A statement can contain accurate information without establishing that the spiritual source behind it is approved by God.

We must examine more than the surface appearance of a message.

Three possible explanations for unusual experiences

When evaluating a questionable spiritual manifestation, we should remember that several explanations may be possible.

I - It may be a genuine operation of the Holy Ghost. God is able to work beyond our personal experience or expectations.

II - It may arise from ordinary human causes. Emotional excitement, suggestion, stress, fear, expectation, or misunderstanding may influence someone's behavior. Not every unusual manifestation is supernatural.

III - It may involve spiritual deception. Scripture plainly recognizes the reality of deceiving spirits and false spiritual manifestations.

However, we should not assume that every unusual behavior or mistaken spiritual claim is demonic.

That assumption can lead to fear, false accusations, and unnecessary harm.

We must examine the evidence carefully and remain within what Scripture actually establishes.

8 — WHEN SOMEONE SAYS, “GOD TOLD ME”

Jeremiah 23:16 (KJV)

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.”

One of the most common statements heard among Christians is:

“God told me.”

Sometimes the person may genuinely be expressing a conviction that God has placed upon their heart.

But sometimes the statement is used carelessly.

And sometimes it is used to place pressure upon others.

We need to understand the seriousness of claiming that God has spoken.

There is a difference between conviction and revelation

Consider these two statements.

“I believe the Lord may be directing me to make this decision.”

And:

“God told me to make this decision.”

The second statement makes a stronger claim.

It identifies the decision as a direct instruction from God.

That does not mean we should never speak confidently about God's direction.

But we should recognize the responsibility involved.

The danger of confusing desire with divine direction

Suppose someone has wanted to move to another state for several years.

They begin noticing advertisements about that state.

A friend mentions an opportunity there.

They have a dream about moving.

Eventually they announce, “God told me to move.”

Perhaps God is directing them.

But perhaps their desires and expectations have influenced their interpretation of events.

The existence of circumstances that support a desired decision does not automatically establish divine direction.

We should consider Scripture, wisdom, prayer, counsel, responsibilities, and the actual circumstances.

When “God told me” becomes manipulation

Imagine a young man telling a young woman: “God told me that you are supposed to marry me.”

What happens if she does not believe that God has directed her toward that relationship?

Should she feel obligated to marry him because he claims divine revelation?

Certainly not.

Or suppose someone says: “God told me that you must give me a thousand dollars.”

The person receiving that statement may feel pressured to obey because refusing appears equivalent to refusing God.

That is dangerous.

No one should be allowed to use a claim of divine revelation to eliminate another believer's freedom to exercise biblical judgment.

Jeremiah 23:21 (KJV)

“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.”

God condemned those who claimed to speak for Him when He had not sent them.

This should encourage humility and caution in how we describe our spiritual impressions.

It is better to acknowledge uncertainty than to claim divine authority for something God has not actually spoken.

9 — DREAMS, VISIONS, AND PERSONAL PROPHECIES

Acts 2:17 (KJV)

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

We believe the Holy Ghost is still active.

We do not teach that God lost the ability to communicate through dreams and visions after the first century.

Peter connected the outpouring of the Holy Ghost with Joel's prophecy concerning dreams, visions, and prophecy.

But recognizing the possibility of genuine dreams and visions does not require accepting every reported experience as divine revelation.

Not every dream comes from God

Ecclesiastes 5:3 (KJV)

“For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.”

Our daily concerns can influence our dreams.

If someone spends the entire day worrying about a financial problem, it should not surprise us if that concern appears in a dream.

Likewise, memories, fears, desires, and expectations may influence what we dream about.

This does not deny the possibility of God speaking through a dream.

It simply reminds us that dreams can have ordinary explanations.

The test of fulfilled predictions

Deuteronomy 13:1–3

Moses warned Israel that even if a prophet predicted a sign that came to pass, the people must not follow that prophet if he directed them away from the Lord.

This is an extremely important principle.

An accurate prediction does not automatically establish divine approval.

Imagine someone correctly predicting a future event.

People may be impressed.

They may begin trusting everything that individual says.

But if the person subsequently teaches something contrary to Scripture, the accuracy of the earlier prediction does not make the false teaching acceptable.

Truth must be established by God's Word, not by the impressive nature of an experience.

Personal prophecy in the church

Personal prophecy should be approached with both openness and discernment.

The New Testament recognizes the operation of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (KJV)

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”

Prophecy should serve God's purposes and strengthen His people.

But a supposed prophecy that produces manipulation, fear, doctrinal confusion, or unquestioning dependence upon the speaker deserves careful examination.

We must also remember that a personal prophecy does not replace a believer's responsibility to seek God, study Scripture, and make wise decisions.

A practical example

Suppose a visiting minister calls someone forward and announces:

“God has told me that you are going to leave this church and begin a ministry somewhere else.”

That is a significant claim.

Should the individual immediately resign their responsibilities and leave?

No.

The message must be examined.

Does it agree with Scripture?

Is it consistent with the person's spiritual development and responsibilities?

Has the person independently sensed such direction?

Can the matter be considered prayerfully and without pressure?

Is the message being used to create division or undermine legitimate pastoral leadership?

The claim should not be accepted simply because it was delivered dramatically.

Nor should it be rejected solely because it was unexpected.

It should be tested.

10 — CLAIMS OF SPECIAL SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Revelation 2:2 (KJV)

“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”

Notice that Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for testing individuals who claimed to be apostles.

The church was not rebuked for examining those claims.

It was commended.

This establishes that a claimed spiritual office does not exempt someone from biblical examination.

Titles do not establish authority

Someone may call himself an apostle, or prophet.

Another may claim to be a spiritual father over numerous congregations.

But a title does not establish that God has given someone the authority they claim.

Neither does popularity.

Neither does the size of a ministry.

Neither do reports of supernatural experiences.

Ephesians 4:11–12

Paul identifies ministries given for the perfecting of the saints, the work of ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ.

The purpose of ministry is to build up the church.

It is not to establish personal empires or unquestionable spiritual hierarchies.

The danger of self-appointed spiritual rulers

Jesus warned His disciples about leadership modeled after worldly domination.

Matthew 20:25–28

He contrasted rulers who exercise dominion over others with the servant character required among His followers.

Greatness in the kingdom of God is expressed through service.

A genuine minister should not need to intimidate people into recognizing his authority.

His ministry should demonstrate biblical truth, faithfulness, godly character, and service.

Warning signs of spiritual manipulation

There are certain patterns that should cause concern.

A leader may claim that questioning him is equivalent to questioning God.

He may threaten people with divine judgment if they do not obey his personal instructions.

He may demand money based upon alleged revelations.

He may isolate followers from their families, pastors, or other sources of counsel.

He may insist that only he possesses the revelation necessary for spiritual safety.

These practices should be examined carefully.

1 Peter 5:3 (KJV)

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

Peter’s instruction applies directly to spiritual leadership.

God’s people are not the personal property of ministers.

They belong to Jesus Christ.

Pastors and other ministers are entrusted with responsibilities, but those responsibilities must be exercised under the authority of Scripture.

No minister, regardless of title or experience, possesses authority to contradict God’s Word or demand unquestioning personal allegiance.

11 — THE TEST OF LASTING SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Romans 12:2 (KJV)

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Spiritual experiences should never become substitutes for spiritual growth.

Someone may have an emotional encounter during a service.

They may weep, rejoice, or feel deeply convicted.

But what happens afterward?

Does the person become more willing to obey God?

Do they develop a greater hunger for Scripture?

Are they more faithful in prayer?

Do they become more teachable?

Are they growing in holiness, patience, and love?

These are important questions.

Transformation is often gradual

We must be careful here.

Not every genuine encounter with God produces an immediately visible change in every area of a person's life.

Spiritual growth is a process.

Some believers struggle with habits and attitudes that take time to overcome.

Therefore, we should not dismiss someone's experience simply because they are still growing.

However, there should be a direction toward spiritual maturity.

Titus 2:11–12 (KJV)

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

Notice that grace teaches us.

God's work in our lives is not limited to producing emotional experiences.

His grace instructs us to reject ungodliness and live righteously.

The danger of living from experience to experience

Some Christians become dependent upon emotional excitement.

They continually seek another powerful service, another prophecy, another supernatural encounter, or another dramatic spiritual experience.

But they may neglect the ordinary disciplines of Christian growth.

- They do not consistently study Scripture.
- They neglect prayer.
- They resist correction.
- They become spiritually unstable when services are less emotional.

This connects directly with our previous lesson concerning the seasons of church growth.

- There are seasons of planting.
- There are seasons of watering.
- There are seasons of reaping.
- There are seasons of rejoicing.

And then the process begins again.

Not every season produces the same emotional response.

But every season has spiritual value.

A spiritually mature believer does not require constant emotional excitement in order to remain faithful to God.

12 — THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DISCERNMENT AND SUSPICION

Hebrews 5:14 (KJV)

“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

This verse identifies discernment as a characteristic of spiritual maturity.

Notice the expression “by reason of use.”

Discernment develops through practice.

As believers learn Scripture and apply it to their lives, they become better equipped to recognize what is consistent with God's character and Word.

Discernment is not the same as suspicion

Suspicion begins by assuming that something is wrong.

Discernment seeks to determine what is true.

Suspicion can become cynical.

Discernment should remain humble.

Suspicion may look for reasons to condemn others.

Discernment seeks to protect the church and preserve truth.

This distinction is important because people sometimes confuse a critical attitude with spiritual maturity.

Someone who continually finds fault with others is not necessarily exercising discernment.

They may simply be developing a habit of criticism.

James 3:17 (KJV)

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

Godly wisdom is not arrogant.

It is not unnecessarily harsh.

It is not motivated by a desire to embarrass others.

True discernment operates in harmony with godly character.

We must not confuse unfamiliarity with deception

A believer may encounter a genuine operation of the Holy Ghost that differs from what they have previously experienced.

That does not automatically mean the experience is false.

Our personal experience is not the final standard of truth.

Scripture is.

We must be willing to examine unfamiliar experiences without automatically rejecting them.

At the same time, we must never accept an experience simply because it appears powerful or impressive.

Biblical discernment requires both openness to God's genuine work and faithfulness to His written Word.

13 — PRACTICAL BIBLICAL TESTS FOR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

At this point in the lesson, I would bring the entire teaching together with a series of practical questions.

When someone claims to have received a message, prophecy, dream, vision, or other spiritual experience, we should ask:

Biblical test	Question to consider
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| 1. Scripture | Does the message agree with the written Word of God? |
| 2. Jesus Christ | Does it honor the biblical identity and authority of Jesus Christ? |
| 3. Spiritual fruit | What character and conduct are evident in the person's life? |
| 4. Edification | Does it strengthen the church in truth, love, and holiness? |
| 5. Order | Is it consistent with the biblical instructions for spiritual gifts? |
| 6. Humility | Is the person willing to have the experience examined? |
| 7. Accountability | Does the claim respect legitimate biblical oversight without demanding unquestioning obedience? |
| 8. Motivation | Is the person seeking God's glory or personal recognition and control? |
| 9. Transformation | Does the experience encourage obedience and spiritual growth? |
| 10. Truth | Is the claim supported by evidence, or only by the speaker's insistence? |

These questions are not a mechanical formula.

They are practical applications of biblical principles.

Not every question will apply equally to every situation.

But together they help us approach spiritual claims with wisdom rather than impulsive acceptance or rejection.

CONCLUSION — A CHURCH THAT WELCOMES THE SPIRIT AND LOVES THE TRUTH

Let us return to our opening Scripture.

1 John 4:1 (KJV)

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

John did not write these words to destroy believers' confidence in the supernatural work of God.

He wrote them to protect the church from deception.

The same principle applies today.

We should desire the genuine moving of the Holy Ghost.

We should pray for spiritual gifts to operate according to Scripture.

We should believe that God is able to heal, deliver, guide, convict, and transform lives.

But we should never confuse spiritual excitement with spiritual maturity.

We should never confuse supernatural claims with biblical authority.

We should never allow personal revelations to replace the written Word of God.

And we should never surrender our responsibility to examine spiritual claims simply because someone speaks with confidence or carries an impressive title.

1 Corinthians 14:1 (KJV)

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.”

Paul encouraged believers to desire spiritual gifts.

He did not encourage them to fear the genuine operation of the Holy Ghost.

But he also instructed them to exercise those gifts in love, order, and accountability.

That is the balance we must maintain.

Our goal is not to produce a congregation that is suspicious of everything spiritual.

Our goal is to develop believers who are sufficiently grounded in Scripture to recognize what genuinely comes from God.

A spiritually mature believer can rejoice when God moves.

They can also recognize when something is inconsistent with His Word.

They do not need to become fearful.

They do not need to become gullible.

They need to become grounded in truth.

Final thought

The Holy Ghost will never require us to abandon the Word of God in order to experience the power of God.

The same God who inspired the Scriptures is the God who fills believers with the Holy Ghost.

His Word and His Spirit are not enemies.

They work in harmony.

And when the church is firmly grounded in both, we can welcome genuine revival without surrendering biblical discernment.

YOU'RE INVITED!

The North Jersey United Pentecostal Church

We would love to have you join us!

Whether you are searching for a church home, beginning your walk with God, or simply desire to learn more about Jesus Christ and His

Word, there is a place for you here.

Come experience heartfelt worship, biblical preaching and teaching, prayer, fellowship, and the presence of God.

WEEKLY SERVICES

SUNDAY WORSHIP 11:15 AM

MIDWEEK WORSHIP & THE WORD — ENGLISH

Wednesday • 8:00 PM

SERVICIO EN ESPAÑOL Viernes • 8:00 PM

The North Jersey United Pentecostal Church

51 Centre Avenue Secaucus, New Jersey 07094

Pastor Gary Evensen

Watch our services and Bible teaching on YouTube:

YouTube — @NJUPCINC

We hope to see you soon!