

How to discern between your spirit and the Holy Spirit. 1 of 4; Our spirit, - 20201212

Hi all,

A young couple have in their hearts to build a camp for church retreats, rest for pastors, and 'revival' meetings. They visit a property and immediately their hearts are stirred, and they believe God is showing them what could be: Over there across the creek will be a bonfire and picnic area, along the other side will be cabins and trails making their way down to the central barn and conference area in the clearing....they can see it all in their mind's eye and believe in their hearts that is God showing them the vision for the camp.

Believing the Lord is leading them to buy that property they do so at great personal expense but from a business point of view, under funded. With their own money they build the barn where they can have meetings, waiting for the Lord to give them money to complete the vision.

A few years of hard work go by but there is little progress. They've reached out to local pastors offering their camp to the local churches, but no one schedules retreats or conferences with them. They are burdened with constant financial strain, volunteers and caretakers and laborers who have come and gone, and in their hearts they wonder if they missed it. But on the outside they still share the vision of the camp to any who will hear. Oh, they've had some 'revival' meetings over in the 'barn', but nothing close to what they had thought God had put on their hearts. Soon a combination of age, illness, and lack of funds forces them to sell, leaving them wondering how they failed God, where they went wrong.

Their spirit or the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps they had heard from the Lord, but in this hypothetical case they were stirred in their own spirits, which is alive with the life of God so they could see the possibilities of the property in their spirit-man. They took the possibilities they saw in their hearts to mean God was telling them to buy and build. It all felt right in their spirits, it 'bore witness' they were to do so. But if it was God, why didn't it happen?

The hard truth is this with our make believe couple: It was their own hearts and not the Lord and I'll explain how and why in this series. But because they were doing it unto Him, He helped where He could, but He wasn't in the overall vision. The Life in their spirits is full of creativity, but it was descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, the Life of God in their spirits described what could be, but it wasn't God prescribing a course of action.

It is this difference between the born again human spirit that can see the possibilities of what could be, and the Holy Spirit actually telling a person to do thus and so, where people miss it. Very often like this make believe couple above, they make decisions from their own heart but believe it is from God's heart.

How the human spirit works in these things

The fact is we are eternal beings, recreated in our spirit by the Holy Spirit, so we can see Life in about any situation, any task, each according to the grace and gifts given us. Let's say this couple above has a gift from God for new projects. In the past they have helped churches start, or helped build a new sanctuary. On short term mission trips they've been stirred by starting an orphanage or building a new church or digging a new well. That is their gift to start things and because that gift is from God, that gift has Life in every aspect. Whatever new thing is before them, that God-given creativity and Life explodes within them with vision and possibilities. But usually what they see as possible is descriptive, not prescriptive.

If a person is a musician and has on their heart to build a recording studio and offer up-and-coming Christian musicians a place to record and learn, that gift has all the Life of God in it so they immediately see in their spirit all that recording studio could be - maybe in the country with some land around it for example. Maybe in a city with apartments above and a Christian coffee shop on the ground floor...because their gifts are from God revelation and Life flow through those particular gifts. God's creativity will explode within them of what could be - but none of that means God is telling them to do what could be.

The new job

A person starts a new job and very quickly they see what that department could be. They believe the Lord is showing them what could be, and how they will be part of moving that department forward. But every effort is stopped, and they even get reprimanded by the boss, though they think they are trying to move the office forward in God's plan.

Soon this person alerts friends to pray, to rebuke the devil who is trying to keep the office from moving forward in God's plan. The boss must change or be removed they believe. But the truth is this: They perceived what could be in their own spirit, in their own heart, because they have gifts for that kind of work and administration and organization. And truly God could move the office in that direction. But what they perceive in their spirit does not mean God is telling them to be the one to make it happen. They have confused something perceived in their heart of what could be, turning what could be into a mandate from God to make it happen. They took something descriptive to be prescriptive.

The prospective spouse

A man and woman begin dating and spiritually they are on the same spiritual page. They love each other's spirits, their heart, their love of God. But physically there isn't much attraction, and in their soul and life experience, each has baggage that hinders them at every step as they try to get to know one another.

Still, because they are on the same page spiritually they think it must be God. Flash forward a few years and their marriage is a mess. They don't know how they could have fooled themselves into thinking they were in love.

This hypothetical couple fell in love with each other's spirits, but didn't love each other's souls. They had little in common, saw the world not just differently, but from opposite and conflicting directions. Physically there never was any real attraction, but they got married thinking because they were right spiritually, it would work out. She thought she could change him or God would. He thought he could change her or God would - or they could learn to live with their differences.

All along the way they told people God brought their spouse to them, they told people God told them to get married, that God had great plans for them...but it wasn't God. They had taken a love in their spirit for another person's spirit, and turned it into a marriage that was not supposed to be. Still, He would help them if they were open to Him, but He didn't ever plan on them getting married to each other.

This series is about distinguishing between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah faced a man who thought he had a prophetic word for the nation, but he was prophesying out of his own heart and soul, emotionally involved because he loved his country. But what he said was God, wasn't. It was just his own heart. The Lord spent time explaining to Jeremiah the difference between one's own heart and when God speaks - and we will pick it up there next week. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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How to discern between your spirit and the Holy Spirit 2 of 4. From your spirit. - 20201219

Hi all,

I closed last week talking about how Jeremiah was confronted by another so called prophet who gave prophecies for the nation that conflicted with Jeremiah's prophecies. His name was Hananiah, and he had mixed his emotions and his desire for the nation with anything the Lord might have actually been giving him, which caused error. We can do the same thing and miss God, thinking He is leading us when He is not.

Mistaking the human spirit and emotion for God's Spirit and direction

Jeremiah lived in a time when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon threatened to destroy the kingdom of Judah. Hananiah thought himself a prophet and gave personal prophecies and also spoke victory for the nation, that God would fight for Judah as in the days of old. In fact however, God was saying something else through the real prophet, Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was telling King Zedekiah the Lord was saying to submit to Nebuchadnezzar. He used a yoke as an example, to be yoked with Nebuchadnezzar, partner with him, so the nation would be

spared total destruction. The confrontation between Hananiah and Jeremiah before the king is recorded in Jeremiah 28.

Unfortunately the king listened to Hananiah instead of Jeremiah and the city was soon destroyed, and men like Daniel, 'The 3 Hebrew children', and Ezekiel were taken captive to Babylon. In Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10 the Lord told Jeremiah the nation would be captive in Babylon for 70 years before being released to return to their homeland.

Jeremiah saw the fall of the city and nation and wrote Lamentations about the destruction of Jerusalem.

What the Lord taught Jeremiah about false words and direction

Before the confrontation of Jeremiah 28, the Lord had taught Jeremiah about how and why people prophesy wrong things, and what direction or a word from one's own heart looks like. The Lord was especially upset with 'pastors' who did such things. Some things never change! That instruction from the Lord is found in Jeremiah 23, which is what we will look at in some detail.

In that chapter the instruction is about personal prophecy, spiritual dreams, visions people believe to be from the Lord, and so it involves decisions made based on what people believe God is leading in those leadings.

1st element of a false personal prophecy: Vanity and ego

The Lord tells Jeremiah in v16 that the words they speak: "...make you vain. They speak a vision of their own heart."

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 14:3 that a prophecy is first and foremost a word from God to a person that builds them up, encourages them, or comforts them. "The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy" as Revelation 19:10 states, which means a personal word won't be about you, but will glorify Him and about Him.

False prophecies often happen if a person mixes their own emotions, their own religious beliefs including erroneous teaching they believe, or their own immaturity in Christ, or immaturity of age or emotion. That sets the stage for a prophecy or revelation that exalts them, how amazing they are, or maybe what a great ministry they will have, and so on. When it becomes about the person rather than Jesus, it is false.

I had a woman get quite angry with me when she gave me 21 pages of hand transcribed writing, using front and back of the pages, that some so 'prophet' had spoken over her. She said she wanted to know if it was God, or not. I read through it, and the first 5 sentences may have been the Lord. They were words of edification, exhortation and comfort in line with I Corinthians 14:3.

The rest was 20 pages of repeating those 3 sentences in different ways, and were all about how wonderful she was, what gifts she had, what a big ministry she would have, and so on. I told her the first 5 sentences may have been of God, but the rest were in the flesh. She got angry with me and I haven't heard from her since. I thought how her action clothed in humility, was actually driven by her pride thinking I would say 'yea and amen' to the prophet's words over her. Her offense proved the point. It was all about her and her ego and pride all along.

Look at the affect Peter, Paul and the rest of the authors of the NT have had through some 20 centuries. In the gospels do we ever see the Lord talking in flowery language about how great they were and what impact their lives would have? He told Peter he would be a fisher of men, told Paul he was called to Gentiles - but nothing describing 2000 year of impact and being authors of what became our New Testament.

If these men are so great yet had so little told them of God's plans for their lives and the affect of their lives through centuries, why do people today think the Father or Lord would speak a word by the prophet to them that tells them what mighty things they will do in the Lord? Ego. Vanity. Pride.

A side note here

Look at prophecies like Jesus gave in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, or personal words He gave to Peter stating how he would die. The prophecies are rather short in duration, concise, doesn't repeat itself.

Another sign something is off base and a mix of emotion and imagination is if it is long and flowing. Our Father and our Lord are skillful enough with words to say what they want to say concisely and succinctly.

A vision of their own heart, proceeding from vanity

In Jeremiah 23:16 above the Lord tells Jeremiah false words, visions, imaginations not only make people vain, but they "speak a vision of their own heart."

Here is an example. Let's say a person is looking for an apartment to rent. They have 2 choices before them. One is near work and shopping, but is smaller and the view out the windows is of the parking lot. But it is within the budget and convenient. Logically, it is perfect. It fits where they are in life, needing an affordable place to get their life in order for a year or two.

The other one is further away from work and shops, larger, and the view overlooks a park with a nice pond in it. They can see themselves walking in the park. Meeting friends there. It is more expensive, but they believe with God's help they can afford it.

This 2nd choice appeals to the person's emotions, their personal tastes and desires, and they think because it 'fits' with their tastes and the kind of place they can be proud of and have friends over, 'it bears witness'. It fits their soul - their tastes, how they can see them having friends over, and they mistakenly think that good feeling inside their soul is God's peace saying go for it. They mistake their soul to be of their spirit. It is a vision of their own heart.

They choose the appealing apartment, telling themselves it bears witness and God is leading them. Within 6 months they are behind in their rent, the commute to work is wearing them down, and they are wondering what God had in mind when He led them there. It wasn't Him, it was their vanity, their mixing of emotions and personal likes in their own heart that caused them to make the wrong choice.

People do things like this all the time; With selecting spouses, jobs, homes, pets, children, cars, hobbies, churches, schools - anything in life. They make decisions of the soul and then have to suffer the consequences of their actions. They think because something or someone fits their style, what they would like or dislike, it must be the Lord. Sometimes it is, but often they decide based on vanity and comfort of the soul and a vision of their own heart, rather than making the more difficult decision, which would require growth as a person in Christ. My experience has been the more difficult decision is often the Lord, and the easy one is often not Him.

My, this is getting down to the nitty gritty of life isn't it? We are just getting started with what the Lord taught Jeremiah about mixing personal things with the Spirit of God and the error that results. We will pick it up here next week. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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How to discern between your spirit and the Holy Spirit 3 of 4. - 20201226

Hi all,

We closed last week with God's instructions about words that make people vain, from their own imaginations.

Who falls prey to being led of their own heart and imagination?

The Lord tells Jeremiah in 23:17 the kind of people who are susceptible to false words. By false words I mean in the context of this passage - people who are either being led by their own heart and emotions, or have mixed their emotions with what God is actually saying, resulting in error and poor decisions.

"They say to those who despise me....you will have peace, (they speak) to everyone who lives by the imagination of their own heart."

The Hebrew word 'naats' is here translated 'despise'. It first means 'to spurn' or 'turn away from'. So the Lord is teaching Jeremiah the people most susceptible to trusting their own imagination and

thinking it is God, are those who have first turned away from the real thing God wants them to work on, or deal with. The most susceptible are those who have turned from the genuine because it is difficult, spurned it, in search of something easier, a better word.

In context, God was trying to get the people ready for the hardship coming on their nation, but they turned away from genuine words of impending doom in favor of words from 'prophets' that told them the nation wouldn't change.

Examples of people doing that

Last week I gave a hypothetical example of a person choosing between 2 apartments (flats), and choosing the one that appealed to their ego and soul rather than to their budget and need. What God was trying to get them to do was to get their life in order, get their finances disciplined and in order, and so on. But that would be the hard choice. So when they turned from that (spurned), they turned to confirmation from God based on the imagination of their own heart, and got a 'confirmation' of their own imagination.

Another example is the Christian living in difficult circumstances, with a hard life, desperately hoping the rapture will be at any moment. They search for videos and teachings that proclaim Jesus is coming say, in May. But another uses mathematics to calculate dates and says it will be this Passover, or maybe this Yom Kippur. They cling to the hope one of them will be right, to rescue them from this world. They may spiritualize it saying they just want to 'go home', but more often than not the truth is their life is and has been difficult. They don't want to grow up as they should, as Jesus is asking them to do within their circumstance.

I could describe marriages where the woman or man went into it with the thought God had said 'this was the one', only to realize the disastrous union was not put together by God. And they wonder; "Where did I miss it?"

They fell in love with each other's spirits perhaps, but were far apart in their souls. Yet because they had that witness of being on the same spiritual page, they thought God was telling them to get married. He wasn't, they just had a connection spiritually and took the relationship beyond what God intended. Attraction spirit to spirit is too often mistaken for love and the emotions it produces. Maintain the boundaries God intended.

I could describe less tragic life-events as well - like the choice between 2 jobs. One will truly be a job, a growth experience, entry level perhaps, but they feel the witness of God showing them this is what He intends and once hired, promotion will be quick. But the other offer is for more pay, nicer offices, bigger promises for advancement.

They take the 2nd job because the boss appealed to their ego, and their imagination latched onto that. The promises were greater, the office nicer. But within a year the company folded and they went through a difficult time wondering what God was doing - He wasn't doing anything because they had gone with their ego and imagination rather than the more difficult job He wanted them to take.

God didn't speak, yet they ran

In 23:18 the Lord asks, "Who marks (notifies, makes note of) the Word of the Lord when it is given?" The Lord is searching for those who will know what He is actually doing in them, and grow in that.

There was a woman who traveled by air thousands of miles every 6 weeks for Bible seminars, staying a week in a hotel at great expense, plus the costs of each class which was nearly \$400 each (x6 classes). She asked for advice about her husband who didn't know the Lord, and who was upset with her spending the money and being gone so often for so long. She also noted her teenage children weren't walking with the Lord and made fun of her. She wanted to know what spiritual key, what truth could I share with her, what word from the Lord might I have, so her family would get saved?

I told her to stop or at least cut back on leaving her family every 6 weeks for a week at a time, and go back and be the wife and mother God was asking her to be. She replied that she was bored, her life was boring, and in her classes God was showing her so much revelation. And besides, prophet so and so had said this and that about her. How could she be content with her boring life? She would not

mark the word of the Lord because her ego, her vanity, her spirituality told her to keep having the spiritual fun and God would take care of her family. Wrong. She didn't mark God's words.

By contrast some years earlier

We had a woman in our church who was there every time the door opened, plus many volunteer hours in programs and general help. She too was praying for her husband and 2 children. She brought the children to church, but the husband wasn't interested. One day she confided that her husband told her he could not compete with God, though he resented all the time she spent at church.

I told her to stop all activities in the church except for Sunday morning, and spend all those other hours being a wife to her husband, a mother to her children. That was God's word for her. Within 3 weeks her husband walked through the door with her Sunday morning. He was born again and became a member of the worship team.

The key? The wife ignored her imagination and what she felt in the vanity of her spirituality. She laid aside her belief that her prayers and hard work around the church would move God to save her husband, and chose to go home and be that wife and mother God was actually asking her to be. She had marked the word of the Lord to her, and made a sound decision, which got her family saved.

The Lord told Jeremiah in 23:21: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied."

That is the summary of the first part of Jeremiah 23 - people making decisions though God didn't send them, and saying God had said, or God was leading, though he was not doing so. They fell captive to the vanity of their hearts, their imagination, they ignored the true instructions the Lord had for them in favor of doing the easy thing.

Hundreds of years later Paul address some of this in the Corinthian church. In II Corinthians 11 he expresses fear for them because there were so called ministers preaching another Jesus, another gospel, and had another spirit. He told them while he was not impressive in speech nor appearance, what he shared was right and balanced. In v15-20 he says these people look like an angel of light in their presentation, they glory in the flesh (lifestyle of the rich and famous). He says they take advantage of them, take their money (enslave them), even insult them like a slap on the face, but the Corinthians still ran after them to catch the latest word they present - a different Jesus, a different gospel, a different spirit - but they accepted them all!

Does any of this sound familiar in our day? We will close out the series next week with more of what the Lord told Jeremiah...until then, blessings,

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How to discern your spirit or the Holy Spirit, Non-tithers in hell? 4 of 4 - 20210102

Hi all,

I received an email from a Nigerian man very worried for his salvation. He had listened to a man who claimed to have died and been given a tour of hell. There he saw Christians in torment because they did not tithe. He emailed me, is that man's testimony true? Of course it is not, but if the man's experience really happened, how did he get it wrong?

I received several emails from women in Ghana, very worried for their salvation. They had each heard a woman testify she had died and was given a tour of hell. She said Christian women were in hell because they had braided their hair. They mailed me, is that true? Of course it is not, but if that woman's experience is true, how did she get it so wrong?

An 8 year old girl said she saw Jesus, and later painted a picture that she said looked like Him. That world famous painting is of a very handsome caucasian man with swept back hair, and close cropped beard.

Many have taken what she painted as gospel truth, believing her instead of Isaiah 53: 2 that says; "He has no stately form nor attractiveness that we should look upon Him, and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should be attracted to Him." How did she get it so wrong?

A boy said he went to heaven when he was 4 years old. He said every person in heaven has wings. That's not scriptural, not anywhere in the history of Judaism or Christianity, and refuted by literally thousands of others who have been to heaven and back - not to mention the millions of people seen in the book of The Revelation who are just normal people. When you die, your spirit doesn't suddenly sprout wings. How could the 4 year old get it so wrong?

The mix of immaturity, inexperience, erroneous religious teaching, and the human factor

The Nigerian man's church taught if you don't tithe you will go to hell. The Ghanian women's church taught if women braid their hair they will go to hell. The 4 year boy was, well, a 4 year old boy so he thought we all got wings when we went to heaven. The 8 year old girl was an 8 year old white American girl, so painted Jesus accordingly.

Assuming each experience was real, their errors happened because they filtered their experiences through their religious beliefs or childhood ideas.

Your spirit or the Holy Spirit?

In Acts 17:16 Paul was in Athens and it says; "...his spirit was stirred in him as he observed the city given to idolatry." Notice it wasn't God stirring Paul. Jesus didn't appear to him. His own spirit, his heart, his soul, was stirred within himself as he observed his surroundings.

An inexperienced Christian in our day might say, "God just rose up in me", but that would be error. God didn't rise up, Paul's own spirit, his own soul, rose up. The Greek of 'stirred' means 'to provoke, to stimulate' - and it happened while he watched the idolatrous activities. What he saw, what he heard, stirred or provoked his spirit. He was Jewish, he had never before seen a whole city given to breaking a Jewish commandment he had grown up with.

But it wasn't God doing it, it was within Paul based on his life experience, his beliefs. Thousands of others in Athens came and went - but Paul was stirred in his spirit, not them.

In Luke 24:32 after Jesus had disappeared from the men He had walked with to Emmaus, they said to themselves, "Didn't our hearts burn within us, as He talked with us while we walked, and while He explained scriptures to us?"

Their spirits burned at the truth presented by the resurrected Lord. Today a person might say, "God just burned in my spirit" or "God rose up in me", but that would be incorrect. It was their heart, just as it was Paul's spirit that rose up. Christians not knowing the difference think it always must be either God or not. They fail to realize our spirit has been with us since we have been alive - our 'real' self, our spirit, has walked through life and gained experience.

When a child raised among alcoholics grows up and comes to the Lord, they will often be able to tell in their spirit when they meet a person, if that person is an addict or not. How? Because their spirit knows the feel of that alcoholic spirit because they were raised around it (or have been delivered from it). God's Spirit will bear witness to the truth of what they sense in their spirit, but it is their spirit that senses that.

It takes a person who is mature, solid in the knowledge of the Word, and integrity to just let the experience stand on its own merits: To be able to separate the Father actually talking to them or a stirring in their spirit, to just experience without filtering it through life experience or religious tradition. The apostle John didn't try to explain what he saw that became the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He just wrote it out and people for nearly 2000 years have been trying to figure it out - but he never sought to explain it - it just happened to him.

Your spirit is the core you, and influenced by your life experience

How does one express to others a visit to heaven? I've been there and I still can't describe adequately the colors, the life, the experience. I share a bit here and there, but words fail. So it is understandable

if a 4 year old or 8 year old or church members believing error try to understand their experiences through the filters of their lives.

People often think their soul - what they think and feel - is their spirit. It is not. But our spirit and soul are united with only the Person of the Word able to separate between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, thoughts and intent of the heart*. It is a life-long journey to learn how to distinguish between say, one's spirit stirred in him or a vision or dream that is of your own imagination, rather than the Spirit of God actually depositing something in you, or saying something to you, or giving you the experience. *Hebrews 4:12-13

Jeremiah was confronted by a man who loved his country and held strong positions about God. But he prophesied out of those feelings, opinions, and imagination rather than the Spirit of God. Let us move with caution, tact, and timing when we think we have something of God, being willing to hold it in us while we measure it against the Word of God, the ways of God, the accepted beliefs of the faith. And may we learn to know the Presence of the Spirit of Truth, who serves to guide us into all truth; may we be sensitive to Him and distinguish between Him and our own spirit and opinions. New subject next week, until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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