

## **The Gift of Discerning of Spirits**

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*(The Eighth in a series of articles on the charismata and the Holy Spirit)*

Soon after receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit I became aware of the existence of evil unlike anything ever before experienced. I always believed there is a devil in the world attempting to deceive and turn us against God, but never had I recognized Satan personified. When the word got out that I was a "charismatic" people came to my church requesting exorcism because, according to them, they were demonized by evil spirits. Most of the time they were agents of the evil one putting me in the position of being deceived, and testing me as to how much I would depend upon the Holy Spirit rather than a personal desire to help someone. There are times when things we do out of compassion are not the best. You have heard of TOUGH LOVE!

My first encounter came shortly after we had sponsored a Healing Mission at my Church in Charleston WV. That occasion for ministry precipitated my receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A phone call from one of our parishioners caused me to meet with a young lady who had been raised in Charleston and now was part of the Christy Minstrel singing group. We are talking about the year 1969! She had fled Los Angeles returning to Charleston because of weird apparitions appearing in her bedroom at night and things being strewn over the apartment during her absence. She thought returning home she could get away from whatever was happening but they followed her. Because of the recently held Healing Mission I responded differently to her appeal for help than I probably would have done earlier in my ministry. The priest who conducted the Healing Mission had also witnessed to me about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and I phoned him for advice in ministering to this young lady. On April 25, 1969, the date I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit without understanding what was happening, was also my first experience at praying exorcism over a person. The end result of that morning's ministry was a freeing of this lady, her eventual leaving the Christy Minstrel and becoming a recognized Gospel Singer married to a Presbyterian minister. After that morning of ministry she never experienced those unexplainable things again and JESUS became the love of her life. Her attack by the evil one was real.

Not every one who ask for exorcism necessarily needs one. A Jewish lady

from Miami Beach came to me when I was Rector of Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in Miami. She brought with her a tabloid explaining how an exorcism was to be administered. She explained that she had been to others without receiving help, and I was the only one in all Miami who could free her. I doubted that.

Some clergy met regularly with a Christian psychiatrist to whom we unloaded and received counseling. I was nearing vacation time and knew if I left this woman to my assistant he would exorcise her. I didn't think that was what she needed, and I knew I was being set up for failure because she was unwilling to accept responsibility for her own behavior. I asked the psychiatrist if he would meet with her once during my vacation for an assessment, and I told her that if the doctor said to do an exorcism I would comply. She met him. He told me that if I did an exorcism she would be "re-possess" before she cross the Miami causeway to her home. Upon my return I met her and told her to choose what was the strongest demon she wanted exorcised and I would do that at our next appointment. She chose "anger" and I told her I would exorcise anger, and if she felt it returning, she would need to say "anger, in the name of Jesus you leave me".

We had the exorcism. She returned the next week for a follow up appointment. She was having no additional problems. Several times she felt she was getting angry and did what I instructed. I phoned my psychiatrist friend and told him what I did. He said "you were given wisdom from the Lord; you made her accept responsibility for her behavior".

There are evil spirits and they do demonize the people of God but many wish to cast out the devil rather than repent of their sin.

We had a service at the University of Baguio in the Philippines. The priest who invited us had prepared a group of people to receive Jesus as Savior during that afternoon evangelistic service. I had a team of Americans with me and instructed them to minister to the people who responded to the invitation to accept Jesus. One team member came to me. A woman with whom she was praying was choking every time she ask her to say "Jesus is Lord". I went with her to the lady and sure enough, something was causing her to choke when she was asked to claim Jesus as Lord of her life. I prayed against the devil trying to prevent her from turning to Jesus and she was freed to say "Jesus is Lord" without difficulty. It was not pretense; it was real.

One of the Tanzanian Anglican bishops told me that sometimes when they have evangelistic services in the bush country people will come and disrupt. I asked him what they did because in America we would remove the person or call the police and have them arrested. He said they would take them aside from the gathered people, cast out the devil, baptize them and bring them back into the meeting. And he did not consider himself a "charismatic". On the mission field we find greater occasion for exorcism than in the United States. It is not because there is more demonic activity on the mission field than in America. In America we deny the existence of evil and call it by some psychosis. It is because some mental and emotional problems are camouflaged with pills when a good Christian counselor could alleviate the symptoms by dealing with the source through healing prayer, especially praying in the Spirit. And much depends on the person's willingness to acknowledge whatever sin is at the source of the problem and repent from that sin so the Holy Spirit can correct the behavioral problem of the person's life. Sin opens the door for the devil and grants permission to him to bring trouble into one's life.

Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what is evil and how to deal with it. He will also reveal the good spirits (angels) who are ministering spirits from God. Discerning the action of evil and the reality of good will produce spiritual maturity and enable us to more adequately deal with the perplexing problems of life.