

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT, FAVOR AND GIFTS

AIM: Although we say that we are “People of the Book” and “People of Faith” and “Holy Spirit Led” do we really seek spiritual discernment when we have decisions to make? In this lesson, we will examine examples where spiritual discernment was used on the early church and consider the positive outcome that were achieved.

INTRODUCTION

- A. Spiritual Discernment = Relying on the Holy Spirit and the Bible to guide, inform, influence and ultimately govern how we make decisions.
- B. How do we incorporate the Holy Spirit and Scriptures in the decisions we make both at church and at home?
- C. As Saints, we have the mind of Christ (¹⁶ “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” *But we have the mind of Christ.* **1 Corinthians 2:16 (NRSV)**)
- D. How do we distinguish between the decision making process in the broader society and the decision making process in the church?
- E. God is in Control

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Acts 1:15-26 Who should replace Judas as the next Apostle?

¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ¹⁶ “Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; ¹⁷ for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry...” ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it’; and, ‘Let another take his office.’” ²¹ “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” ²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

- A. **Problem:** Judas needed to be replaced (v. 16)
- B. **Narrative for a Decision:** Was given by Peter (vv. 15-23)
- C. **Process:**
 1. The group proposed two names (v. 23)
 2. The group prayed (vv. 24, 25)
- D. **Result:** The group cast lots, and Matthias was chosen (v. 26)

Acts 4:23-31 Should the Apostles continue speaking in the Name of Jesus or stop as they were commanded?

²³ And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things?’” ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.” ²⁷ “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

- A. Peter and John are arrested for preaching Christ (vv. 1-3). After their release, the religious rulers commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (vv. 18-21)
- B. Peter and John had previously given their response to the leaders’ command (v. 20)
- C. **Problem:** Should the disciples stop speaking in the Name of Jesus as they were commanded?
- D. **Narrative for a Decision:** Was given by Peter and John (v. 23)
- E. **Process:** The group prayed, and subsequently prayed for more boldness to speak (vv. 24-30)
- F. **Result:** God answered, and filled them with the Holy Spirit to speak with boldness (v. 31)

Acts 6:1-7 How do we ensure that everyone’s needs are met?

¹ Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out

from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. ⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

- A. **Problem:** The Hellenist complained that their widows were neglected in the daily food distribution (v. 1)
- B. **Narrative for a Decision:** Was given by the Apostles (v. 2-4)
- C. **Process:** Seven men were chosen and brought before the Apostles, who prayed, and laid hands on them (vv. 5-6)
- D. **Result:** The word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied (v. 7)

Acts 12:25; 13:1-13 Who should go and minister the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark ¹ Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant... ¹³ Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem...

- A. **Problem:** Of the many qualified prophets and teachers, who should go and minister the Gospel of Jesus?
- B. **Narrative for a Decision:** Was given by the Holy Spirit
- C. **Process:** The Holy Spirit chose Barnabas and Saul, and the church fasted, prayed, laid hands and sent them
- D. **Result:** Barnabas and Saul went out preaching to the Gentiles and had a successful ministry

THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

- A. Unfortunately, some use “Spiritual Discernment” as a tool for Enabling, Guilting and Manipulating
 - 1. “The Spirit said.” “The Spirit is not leading me in that direction.” “Let’s pray about it and see what God says.”
 - 2. The Holy Spirit will only give one response / one answer
- B. If we are spiritually Discerning, where does Free Will enter?
 - 1. If we genuinely have Free Will, then God’s Will means nothing
 - 2. Jesus did not exercise Free Will
 - a. **John 4:34**, *Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.*
 - b. **John 6:38**, *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*
 - 3. Paul did not exercise Free Will
 - a. **Romans 1:1**, *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...*
 - b. **Titus 1:1**, *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ*
 - 4. Example: Did Adam and Ever exercise Free Will when they ate the fruit?
 - a. **Revelation 13:8; 17:8**, ⁸ *...whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. ⁸ ...whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world...*
 - b. **Acts 2:23**, ²³ *But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. (NLT)*
 - 5. Our job is to stand still and let God do what God wills to do
 - a. **Psalm 46:10**, *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*
 - b. **Exodus 14:14**, *The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*
 - c. **2 Chronicles 20:17**, *You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you...*
- C. When we rely on the Holy Spirit and the Bible to guide, inform, influence and ultimately govern how we make decisions, we receive God’s Favor
 - 1. **Psalm 84:11**, ¹¹ *For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly. (NRSV)*
 - 2. **Psalm 5:12**, ¹² *Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield. (NIV)*
- D. Spiritual Gifts: **1 Corinthians 12:1-12** ⁷ *A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other... ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*