

The Gift of Discernment
1 Cor 12:1-11, 1 Tim 4:1-16

Well friends, there are only 16 shopping days left until Christmas, 15 if you open presents on Christmas Eve... so how's your Christmas shopping coming along so far?

Do have any idea of what gifts you will give to your family and friends this year? Any idea of what you might give to your minister and church elders? 😊 And what about the gifts which you are hoping to receive for Christmas? What's on your list?

Maybe you have simple tastes and you'll be happy to get a box of Ferrero Roche or Pot of Gold, or new socks, new gloves, or gifts of that nature?

Or perhaps you have more expensive tastes... and you're hoping to see some brand names under the tree this year – Apple, Samsung, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Tiffney, Uggs, Lulu Lemon, Rolex etc...

You're hoping to open up your presents and find a genuine Louis Vuitton purse, or an authentic Rolex watch...

And if you should receive such an expensive gift - what's the first thing that tends to run through your mind, or the minds of those who see what you've received?

What do they ask when you hold up that \$600.00 purse or that \$1000.00 watch? They want to know... you want to know... is it real? Is it a genuine Louis Vuitton? Is it an authentic Rolex?

Because there is a possibility it could be a fake, a knock-off – a counterfeit item.

Now when I was growing up you kind of figured that you were getting a fake Rolex when you were approached by some guy in a trench coat wearing a fedora and sunglasses who leaned out of the alley and said “Psst – Hey buddy, wanna buy a watch?”

Today counterfeiters are far more sophisticated and hard to track and they do such a good job at copying product that it's very difficult to tell if you have purchased the genuine item – especially if you've bought it on-line.

Now some people don't care if they get a knock-off, all that matters to them is that it looks like they have something expensive so that others can admire what they supposedly have.

But in spite of being able to look wealthy at a fraction of the cost there are real dangers and concerns to buying knock-off items.

Counterfeiting operations deprive the global economy an estimated \$600 billion of revenue a year which means that there are tens of thousands of legitimate jobs connected to these goods which are eliminated.

And since they operate their manufacturing process under the radar - counterfeiters don't pay taxes which puts a higher burden on the rest of us who do.

There do not have to provide fair wages, benefits, or workplace safety for their employees. They are not held accountable to human rights and or child labor laws, or environmental laws.

And you can be at risk because you don't know what materials were actually used to make the counterfeit products, or if they've cut corners on safety issues – especially with electronic devices, and if you buy on-line you may be opening yourself up to identity theft.

That's why it important, especially if you are buying items on-line, that you have a way to determine what is genuine and authentic and what is not.

And friends it's no different with Grace-gifts – it's important to determine if they are the genuine real deal; given and

powered by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ... or - if they are fake, counterfeit gifts; powered by our own spirit, or worse... an evil spirit, which will divide the Body and tear it down.

And we know that this is a real problem because scripture warns us about it.

Jesus warned the disciples saying *“Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.”* (Luke 21:8)

John instructs us *“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* (1 John 4:1)

And Paul describes the most disturbing part of this problem; that *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”* (2 Cor 11:14)

In other words the demonic and satanic doesn't always look evil and twisted and horrific – sometimes it appears very attractive, life giving, illuminating.

Many people are attracted to the story of Rhonda Byrne and her book “The Secret” and what she teaches about the laws of attraction, and they find it helpful – but “The Secret” is a counterfeit gift.

What she proposes about life and how this world works contains enough creational truth to make it work, but leaves out the important revealed truths that describe what God is doing about sin and evil.

Those who believe her teachings will go through life being positive; believing that this will attract other positive things to them - but unaware that positivity cannot deal with your sin, or prepare you to face judgment.

This is why in the passage that we read this morning from 2 Timothy, Paul is warning Timothy about the reality that there

will be false teaching and false teachers that will seek to lead people – even himself away from the faith - and he must be on guard against it.

So he instructs Timothy *“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”* (2 Tim 4:16)

False teaching, counterfeit knowledge, false prophets – they can lead us astray, cause us to put our faith and trust in something other than Jesus Christ.

False teaching sounds good – but ultimately doesn’t it teach us the whole truth; which includes forgiveness of sin and salvation to new life through Jesus Christ.

Now this counterfeit operation is not limited to what people say and teach; it also includes what people do.

Many people today are jumping on the “social justice bandwagon” wanting to do good deeds, wanting make a

difference, but they do not realize that what is driving many charities and organizations who do this good work is the spirit of humanism, and this produces counterfeit gifts of mercy, serving and helps.

Remember friends – scripture reveals *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.”* In other words people who appear to be doing the right thing.

Now it is a bit disturbing to discover that there can be false mercy, counterfeit service and helping others in a way that is somewhat Satanic.

But think about it for a moment – If Christian mercy, Christian service, and Christian help and so on are meant to be signs of the coming of Christ’s Kingdom where all things will be made new...

then the best way for Satan to fight this, to keep people from hearing about the coming kingdom and getting a foretaste of it, is by producing counterfeit charity powered by humanism.

This makes what the Church does and proclaims redundant or unnecessary- because we can save ourselves and here's the proof – look at the difference we've made in our society, in our world.

Do you see what I'm talking about?

Friends, Satan is an extremely clever and deceitful enemy – and if he can keep people from realizing their need for the gospel and Jesus Christ by feeding the illusion that through using their own strength to do good things they can eventually bring justice and peace to this world – He will.

He will tolerate people seeking justice and peace and good deeds for the few years of their life if it's the means by which he can deceive them into joining him for an eternity of suffering and torment.

This is why I'm always saying that *“we don't host Inn from the Cold to get rid of homelessness – we host it as a statement of our belief that one day Christ will return and there will be no more homelessness...”*

Counterfeit gifts of mercy, helping and service are the wood, hay and straw which Paul is speaking about in 1 Cor 3:12 which will be destroyed in the fires of judgment instead of being refined and purified like gold, silver, and precious stones which are the genuine grace-gifts of mercy, helping and service.

Counterfeit gifts and what we've built with them won't survive the judgment, and friends... counterfeit gifts also give the enemy an opening to get into our life to cause trouble.

You may recall a year or so ago there was a big scandal in the U.S. and Canadian military because somehow counterfeit electronics parts were being used in military vehicles and there was a risk of those parts failing or creating a possibility

for espionage and this put soldiers and national security at risk.

In the same way when counterfeit grace-gifts get in our lives or into the church, it gives the enemy a foothold to harass us, to discourage us, to fight against us, to destroy our faith and the faith of others – this is a very real danger.

And I can speak from personal experience how easily this can happen. In one church where I was serving I recruited people for leadership positions thinking that I knew them well enough to determine that they had gifts in certain areas – but I was fooled, they had counterfeit gifts.

Once they were in leadership positions the enemy had the opportunity to cause all sorts of division and conflict through them and if it had been allowed to continue it would have put an end to the ministry in that church, but God graciously intervened.

Other Christians came alongside this situation and were able to see the hidden agendas of these people and they confronted them and these people backed away and stepped down before any serious long-term damage was caused.

So I've personally experienced how dangerous and destructive the counterfeit leadership, false wisdom, and imitation administration can be.

And I hope that these examples friends raise our awareness of how important it is to be able to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit grace-gifts.

Now the good news friends, is that Jesus Christ sent us the Holy Spirit to help us in this task – that's one reason why the Holy Spirit is called the "Helper" (John 14:26) – He helps us to discern what is true from false by leading us into all truth.

And, the Holy Spirit also gives a specific grace-gift for this task – mentioned in 2 Cor 12:10 – the ability to "discern the spirits."

Now from what I've read and studied in the scripture and experienced in my own life, this grace-gift is the ability to look through at a situation or someone's external façade to determine what spirit is really behind it.

Through this grace-gift the Holy Spirit reveals to us what is false teaching so we can avoid it, He shows us what is motivating "social justice" efforts so we know whether we should participate to encourage or correct those efforts.

He reveals if people are relying on their creational abilities instead of grace-gifts as they participate in the ministries of the church, and exposes hidden agendas and evil motives so they may be confronted.

And He enables us to determine if a right action was actually wrong, or a wrong action could have been right.

Friends, without this grace-gift of discernment – both as a church and as individuals, we are at the mercy of the enemy

whom Peter describes as a *"roaring lion, roaming about seeking someone to devour"*

I'm sure you can see the need for this gift and how important it is that we ask the Holy Spirit to give this gift generously to us and to Valleyview – especially those in leadership.

So, I want to encourage you to do that, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to bless us with more and more Discerning of the Spirits as one of the gifts we want to receive this Christmas.

Now, we need a bit more teaching on grace-gifts at this point because the discernment of the spirits is one of those gift areas where we all have a part to play in it.

Each Christian has to take responsibility to "discern the spirits" on a basic level as they go about their daily life and interact with others, the media, what they study and read and listen to etc...

That's why Paul instructs Timothy to set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity and devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

This activity will provide a basic benchmark and general level of information for the Christians in Timothy's congregation to use in discerning the spirits in their everyday life.

The same is true today – there are some basic guidelines in scripture that the Holy Spirit gives us to help us discern the spirits in our day to day life.

1 Cor 12:3 *"no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."*

1 John 4:2 says *"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."*

Additionally the Gifts of the Spirit should bear the Fruit of the Spirit listed Galatians 5:22. So you can discern the spirits by looking to see if they produce all the fruit *"love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

And just knowing that grace-gifts are abilities that come out of experiencing Christ's forgiveness, and that they are intended to build-up and equip the body of Christ, is helpful for all of us in our responsibility to determine genuine or counterfeit gifts.

But, some people in the Body will be given the specific Grace-Gift of Discerning the Spirits where they are able to see beyond what the rest of us see - and this is very important in circumstances where for all intents and purposes everything seems to be legitimate.

Those who have been the specific grace-gift will receive specific insight from the Holy Spirit about what is truly going on and whether it is from the Holy Spirit, the human spirit or an evil spirit.

Sometimes this gift is bestowed for a specific circumstance, other times it is given for people to use on a regular basis in ministry - where they might help fellow Christians sort through their emotional and spiritual baggage on their journey to healing.

But in the end – whether it is just a responsibility we have, whether we have received a specific insight for a situation, or whether we have this gift to use on an ongoing basis...

the point is that the Holy Spirit is helping us, helping the Church to determine what is authentic and what is counterfeit so that we can experience the blessing these grace-gifts are intended to bring.

Because that's what gifts are for right – to bring blessing...

So friends, 16 days left to Christmas, 15 to Christmas Eve – and if you are still wondering what you might like to give or get –

let me recommend that you add the grace-gift of “discerning the spirits” to your list and ask the Holy Spirit to bless you with it this year... and friends you can expect that it will be the real deal.

Let's pray...