

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

Well brothers and sisters – when it comes to giving gifts at Christmas are you the kind of person that prefers to give gifts or receive gifts?

And if you are the giving kind of person are you a prepper or a last-minute-er? Do you like to go in person to the store and pick things out, or do you get it all done online? And this year – were you able to go shopping in person, or were you forced to shop online?

And do you like it if people are really specific in telling you what they want, so you can just get it for them? Or do you want to choose the gift for them and surprise them with your thoughtfulness?

If you like to choose gifts and the people you are buying for have... simple tastes and they will probably be happy to get a box of Ferrero Roche or Pot of Gold, or new socks, new gloves, or gifts of that nature.

But if you have to buy for someone with more expensive and high-end tastes... you better make sure that you're getting brand name gifts for them if you hope to have them appreciate what you've given them. Something along the lines of Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Tiffney, Lulu Lemon, Rolex, Bose, Maker's Mark – or whatever is expensive and trendy these days.

And if you are the gift-getter kind of person, with expensive tastes, when you open a gift and it's a Louis Vuitton purse, or a Rolex watch... what's the first thing that tends to run through your mind, or in 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 it used to be that you would get fake purses and watches from some guy in a trench coat wearing a fedora and sunglasses standing in the shadows of an alley, who would call out as you passed by “Psst – Hey buddy, wanna buy a watch?”

But today counterfeiters are far more sophisticated and harder 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.

And others don’t care if it’s a knock-off because it appears they can afford to give really expensive gifts to their friends and family, but it hardly costs them anything.

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.

They do not have to provide fair wages, benefits, or work place 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 brothers and sisters, I use this example about authentic gifts because it works the same with Grace-gifts.

When you see someone using a gift in the church, or when someone wants to use their gift to minister to you 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.

Do you remember the story of Rhonda Byrne, author of the book *"The Secret"* and what she teaches about the laws of attraction? A few years back this was huge – everybody was buying into this and finding it helpful – but *"The Secret"* is a counterfeit gift.

What Rhonda Byrne 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.

The same holds true for some other popular bloggers and authors like Jen Hatmaker, Rachel Held Evans, Nadia Bolz-Weber. They claim to be Christians and seem to have a real gift for writing, and explaining biblical teachings in an inspirational winsome way that appeals to the masses.

They look and sound like the real thing and many people experience positive inspiration from their gifts... but these are counterfeit gifts.

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 brothers and sisters, if *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”* But that verse continues and tells us *“It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.”* In other words, these are 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 such grace-gifts 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?

Many Canadians finally clued in on counterfeit charity this past summer as the WE scandal broke. The National Post published an article in July called *“The Gospel of WE, the legend of the Kielburgers and their secularly sacred movement.”*

The article says *“The problem the WE charity aims to solve in 2020, the authors suggest, is actually spiritual impoverishment. The answer, as ever, is empathy. “Caring is cool,” as the WE slogan goes. It means changing “values,*

*beliefs, attitudes, and yes, daily decisions,” as the Kielburgers describe the scope of the WE philosophy. This, wrote the brothers, can “work miracles, almost literally.”*

Brothers and sisters, 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, or a little bit of his power, 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 because it kept them from realizing they need Jesus.

This is why I’m always saying that *“we don’t do good works to try and change the world, we do good works to proclaim the truth that one day Christ will return and the world will be changed!”*

Counterfeit gifts of mercy, helping and service are the wood, hay and straw which Paul is speaking about in 1 Cor 3:12 which he says will be destroyed in the fires of judgment.

Eventually counterfeit gifts will come up short, something will happen that shows they are fake. As everybody saw happening in the WE scandal this past summer.

In comparison the genuine grace-gifts of mercy, helping and service are refined and purified like gold, silver, and precious stones – which is what Paul urges us to build with instead.

Counterfeit gifts and what has been built with them won’t survive the final judgment, let alone the occasional political scandal, and counterfeit gifts also give the enemy an opening to get into our life to cause trouble – like a trojan horse.

You may recall a few years 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.

And recently there has been a great deal of concern about this same situation occurring with Huawei components being used to build and run our 5G wireless networks.

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 some enthusiastic and talented people to become elders in the church. I thought I knew them well enough to know their character and they appeared to have certain grace-gifts, but I was fooled, they had counterfeit gifts.

Once they were in leadership positions, Satan had an open door into the leadership of the church which gave Him the

opportunity to cause all sorts of division and conflict through these people. If they had been allowed to continue in those positions the chaos would have put an end to the ministry in that church, but God graciously intervened and removed them.

There were other Christians who came alongside me 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.

Additionally, there were one or two people who cautioned me about these people whom I was recruiting, but I did not listen.

So I've personally experienced how dangerous and destructive the counterfeit leadership, false wisdom, and imitation administration can be, and... how important it is to have people with the gift of discernment, and to pay attention to that discernment – even when it contradicts what you believe you know about something or someone.

So, I hope that these examples also raise your awareness of how important it is to be able to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit grace-gifts through the gift of discernment.

Now the good news, 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, as I’ve mentioned, the Holy Spirit also gives a specific grace-gift for this task. 2 Cor 12:10 speaks about 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 actually have been right.

Brothers and sisters, this is a very important gift because 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 have received at Christmas, and through-out this coming year.

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, because Satan has some sort of plan against us to try to undercut the work of the church.

Then 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 – to bring blessing... and that is what God desires for us at Valleyview - A church with streams of blessing flowing out into the community.

So may the Holy Spirit give us the grace-gift of discernment and let's continue to Be the Blessing – the genuine blessing!  
Amen let's pray...