

The Biblical Discernment Test: **Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit**

The charismatic movement is growing at an astounding rate. All kinds of supernatural movements marked by miracles, manifestations, along with signs and wonders are popping up all over the earth.

Do you understand the perspective of charismatic Christians? Can you correctly discern a genuine miracle or spiritual movement from the counterfeit and false ones? I hope the following article will be a blessing to the body of Christ Jesus.

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As Christians, we are called to love one another and build one another up in the faith. Jesus prayed concerning all believers: “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17: 23)

Unfortunately, as I research what God is doing in our day I come across too many Christians sitting around criticizing and condemning their brothers and sisters in Christ instead of building them up. This saddens me and I pray that the body of believers will come to love one another as Jesus desired. Only then will the world truly see Jesus in us.

There is a deep division in the body of Christ. Jesus warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe that there is room for disagreement and alternate perspectives within the body of Christ; but what worries me is when portions of the body begin attacking other portions of the body. These attacks come from deep-rooted misunderstanding of what the other members of the body stand for and confusion regarding how we are to discern whether a movement or a miracle is from God or not. My hope is that this article can bring understanding and ultimately unity to the body of Christ.

Two Perspectives

At issue here are two perspectives within Christianity:

On the one hand, there are the charismatic-leaning Christians who believe that supernatural giftings as described in I Corinthians 12 and other places are for today. The charismatics believe that God is still speaking to his children and that God has empowered us to supernaturally do his work in the earth.

On the other hand, there are the cessationist-leaning Christians who tend to believe that after the canon of scripture was sealed God no longer needed to endow his church with miraculous supernatural giftings. These brothers and sisters in Christ explain that those giftings were only meant to confirm the word of God as preached by the apostles. Now that we have the full canon of scriptures there is no need for revelation of God’s truth and there is no need to confirm the revelation of God’s truth with signs and wonders.

Many cessationists are dedicated to protecting the Bible’s authority in the Christian’s life and are anxious to keep people from being misled by miracle working teachers who might lead people into false doctrine. They fear that people may trust the miracles as evidence of the teacher’s authority instead of relying on the Bible for that authority in a Christian’s life.

Some cessationists spend much time trying to cast doubt on miracles and when the miracles are convincing they argue that the source of the miracle-working power is demonic. They also like to discredit charismatic Christian men and women whose

ministries are supernaturally empowered. They consider these Christian men and women to be dangerous to the faith.

I know that these people – who consider themselves to be apologists for the faith – sincerely believe that the charismatic Christians are in error. I pray that this article will help bring a better understanding of who the charismatics are and why they value the supernatural, miraculous power of God in their lives. I also pray that all Christians – whether cessationists or charismatics – will give themselves over to the great command of Jesus to love one another.

Condemning and criticizing brothers and sisters in the faith does not display God's love in our lives. We should love all of our brothers and sisters whether we agree with their theology or not. That means that charismatics should love even the brothers and sisters in Christ who criticize and attack our spiritual brothers and sisters. That means that cessationists should love the men and women who rely on the Holy Spirit's power to share God's good news with the hurting people of the world. Furthermore, loving one another means that when any of our brothers or sisters – even one of our pastors or leaders of the faith – are caught in a sin we should not cast stones but we should seek true restoration for that person (Galatians 6:1). We should follow Jesus' example. He has never turned his back on us even though we have often let him down and fallen into sins. He has always been eager to embrace us and restore us and build us up.

Understanding These Two Perspectives

Having said that, let me shed some light on these two dominant perspectives found in Christianity. Let us seek understanding and come to love the hearts of our brothers and sisters – whether we agree with them or not.

Both charismatics and cessationists believe the Bible is the ultimate revelation of truth showing us the way of salvation and the invaluable source of sound doctrine.

The cessationist might complain that charismatics allow for additional revelations besides the Bible. But to be fair we should point out that, although charismatics allow for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and give guidance, they believe that any true revelation from God will not contradict what God has already revealed in scripture. In fact, charismatics teach that any true revelation from God will be supported and confirmed by scripture.

There is a fundamental difference in the way charismatics and cessationists approach the Bible. Charismatics notice that throughout the Bible people are having direct encounters with God. They see frequent miracles throughout the Old and New Testaments, they see personal guidance given to God's people by God himself (for example see Acts 18:9 where the Lord spoke encouraging words to Paul in a vision), and they see verses seeming to indicate that all believers should function in the supernatural (see the last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel According to Mark where he says believers will drive out demons, speak in new tongues, heal the sick by laying on of hands and so forth and see Jesus' words recorded in John 14 where he says anyone who has faith in him will

do what he has been doing and even greater things). Charismatics also see that Paul set a pattern for sharing the Gospel that worked very well for him: ‘My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.’ These words are found in I Corinthians 2. And again in Romans 15 he said “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.” (also see I Corinthians 4:20 and I Thessalonians 1:4-5 for similar statements from Paul).

Charismatics see the Bible as a window into what Christians are to be like. They see people who experience God’s love in a personal and real way (Jesus said, “He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” John 14:21). These people in the Bible experience God’s love and healing and are set free from Satan’s kingdom of darkness. They are empowered to share Jesus’ love and grace with the world.

For charismatics it is not enough to know the stories and the truths of the Bible – they want to also live like the heroes of the faith, whom they see as biblical examples of what our relationship with God can be like.

Meanwhile some Christians (especially cessationists) treat the Bible as more of a history book that documents some unchanging truths. These Christians focus on believing the truths of the Bible but have trouble letting the supernatural experiences of the Bible off the pages into their own lives.

The 72 disciples found in the Bible who went out and healed people and cast out demons in Jesus’ name are not seen by cessationists as a model for today’s Christians. Instead, they are seen as a one-time, special-case, historical event. These Christians prefer to focus on theological truths regarding the process of salvation. They shy away from modern-day Christians with gifts of healing and modern-day Christians with gifts of prophecy for fear that these modern-day events and practices might get more attention than the historical events and teachings found in the Bible.

Some even go so far as to take scriptures out of context in an attempt to prove that these modern-day practicing Christians are illegitimate. An example of this is when they quote I Corinthians 13:8 – “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” – and say that this shows that prophecy and tongues were meant to cease in the church. They sidestep the problem that if this verse means what they say it does then knowledge should have also ceased in the church. Knowledge is of course very important to them. Meanwhile, knowledge joined with practice and experience are important to the charismatics.

To put things into perspective, consider two students of biology. They have both thoroughly studied the chapter of their textbook on animal dissection. One of the students

does not get to have the experience of dissecting an animal but the other does. The student who dissects the pig finds it to be a messy, fascinating experience. He finds the experience much different than he had imagined it to be while he was studying the textbook. Not to say that the textbook was in error in any way. He simply found that the study joined with the experience led to the fullest and most meaningful education. One student can parrot the explanation from the textbook and has a very pristine and orderly view of dissection. The other student benefits from the raw experience of actually dissecting a pig according to the instructions found in the textbook.

How Big is that Box?

Whether cessationist-leaning OR charismatic-leaning Christians, believers often have God inside a box. Some allow for bigger boxes for God than others but they have him in a box all the same. Many Christians feel like they know about God and they have him figured out. They feel qualified to determine if a message or a miracle came from God or not because they know what kinds of things God does and what he says.

Interestingly, these Christians usually do not have such a box for Satan. So, when something happens outside of their God-box, they say it couldn't have been God and must have been the Devil.

One of the boxes that Christians have God in is no bigger than their pocket-sized Bibles. They have decided that God only does the things that were specifically recorded in the Bible.

For example, these Christians see people miraculously receiving gold fillings and say that it couldn't have been from God since that particular miracle was never recorded in the Bible.

But this idea that God can only do the things that were written about in the canon of scripture is not taught anywhere in the Bible. God never put such a restraint on himself.

The scriptures were never intended to exhaustively reveal everything that our all-powerful, eternal God has done and will do. In fact, the Gospel of John concludes with this statement: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

This verse of scripture clearly indicates that the Bible is not intended to tell us everything that God has done. Furthermore, like I said before, there is no scripture that says that God will not do a new thing or that he is limited by what has been included in the canon of scriptures.

In fact, Psalm 115:3 puts it bluntly: "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him."

The Biblical Discernment Test: Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

Also, notice that in John 14:12 Jesus says that his followers will do even greater things than he ever did during his ministry. So, Christians are not limited by what Jesus did. What he did was meant to be a foundation for us to build upon through our faith and reliance on God's power and the Holy Spirit imparted to us.

Sadly, many Christians are experts in Biblical scholarship and know all the things in the Bible but when God does something in their lives they miss it because it doesn't fit into their framework. To such people Jesus spoke this warning in John 5:39: "You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me."

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were very well studied scholars of scripture but they misunderstood what God was doing in their own day. They missed out on Jesus. They condemned him and accused him of doing miracles by Satan's power because what Jesus was doing didn't fit into their understanding of the scriptures. They had a chance to be intimately familiar with God in the flesh but they totally misunderstood him and plotted his destruction.

Let us discern correctly the moves of God in our day and be careful to not miss out on what God is doing now. God is active and anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear and understands what God is doing has the opportunity to join God in the mighty work he is doing in our generation.

Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

We are commanded in scripture to be on guard against false teachings and are warned that just because miracles are performed does not necessarily mean the teacher is from God or is speaking the truth. In fact, we are told that the beast's false prophet will perform great miraculous signs including calling down fire from heaven (Revelation 13:13 and 19:20). Jesus also warned that false messiahs and false prophets will come who will perform great signs and miracles to deceive God's chosen people (Matthew 24:24).

So, what are we to do? Should we reject every wondrous sign and miracle and assume that all such things are from the enemy? Should we bury our heads in the pages of the Bible where we know the miracles and teachings are safe and reliable?

But don't those very same pages in the Bible tell us that anyone who believes in Jesus will do the miracles that Jesus did and even greater ones? (John 14:12) Doesn't Paul the Apostle instruct the believers to eagerly desire spiritual gifts? (1 Corinthians 14:1)

Is it right to ignore the parts of scripture that don't match our personal experiences? Should we discourage Christians who are walking out spiritual truths that we are uncomfortable with? Should we reject anything supernatural for fear that it may come from evil spirits instead of the Holy Spirit and God's holy angels?

The Biblical Discernment Test: Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

In their eagerness to avoid being misled, some Christians tend to label every supernatural miracle as being a counterfeit miracle. And, in fact, there may very well be counterfeit miracles as scripture clearly warns us: 'The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.' (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

But, please keep in mind that for there to be a counterfeit there must also be the real thing that the counterfeit is modeled after. God is the creator; not Satan.

God is the creator. God specializes in creating. That is what comes naturally to him.

Satan, on the other hand, can steal what God created, he can kill what God created, and he can destroy what God created (John 10:10). He can even counterfeit God's creations. But let's not give Satan credit for creating a new miracle. God is the creator. Satan is the thief.

God created every kind of miracle and supernatural wonder. Satan is not creative at all. He can only produce weak forgeries of the true wonders of God. Name any supernatural work that devils do and I can point to the real thing in Jesus. Psychic readings? Those are cheap counterfeits of true prophecy. The beast's false prophet calling fire down from heaven? That is just a copy of what God already did numerous times in the Old Testament. Levitation a few feet of the ground? That is wimpy compared to Jesus walking on water and ascending all the way up into the clouds to return to heaven. Every counterfeit miracle and sign and wonder demonically produced has a very real counterpart with its origins in God's power.

Let's also consider that only truly valuable things are counterfeited. For example, do we have a problem with forgeries of pennies? No! We have forgeries of \$100 bills. Do we have counterfeits of brown paper bags? No! We have forgeries of masterpiece paintings. If it is truly valuable then you can expect someone to try to counterfeit it. The fact that signs and wonders are counterfeited tells me that the real thing is valuable. And of course it is valuable because the real thing points to the power and presence of God in the lives of people on earth. Now, because there is forged money out there, will I reject all money? Of course not! Instead, if I don't want to be deceived, I will learn how to discern if the money is real or counterfeit.

The Biblical Discernment Test

Now, in regards to discerning the current moves of God, the Bible gives us some clear instructions. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7 that we can judge whether a tree is good or bad by its fruit. So, true teachers and miracles from God should cause people to have positively changed lives given over to the fruit of the Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Biblical Discernment Test: Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

Furthermore, in I John 4 we are told that we can know if a spirit (and incidentally a prophet) is from God or not by whether the spirit honors Jesus or not.

Also remember what Jesus said when he was accused of doing miracles by the power of demons. He explained in Mark 3 that there are two kingdoms at war and that we can know which kingdom is sponsoring a move by determining which kingdom is being attacked. So, in the case of Jesus driving out demons, it is evident that the kingdom being attacked is Satan's kingdom which would indicate that God's kingdom is sponsoring the attack.

From this teaching we can learn if a movement is from God or from Satan by determining which side is taking a hit from the movement.

Jesus also warns us in this passage not to blaspheme the movement of God's Spirit by giving Satan credit for what God is doing.

Often I hear my brothers and sisters giving credit to Satan's minions for signs and wonders that are causing thousands of people to wholeheartedly give their lives to Jesus. Can I just point out that if demons are doing those miracles that they must be the stupidest demons ever?!? Why would a demon do a miracle that will cause people to stand in awe of God Almighty and to give praise to God Almighty and to commit their lives to God Almighty and to have increased faith in God Almighty?

Demons do not work to glorify God and lift up the name of Jesus Christ. But the Holy Spirit and God's angels ARE working to glorify Jesus.

So, after looking at these scriptures, we can see that we can clearly discern the source of a spiritual movement or a miracle by asking a series of questions:

What is the fruit like? (Matthew 7:15-23)

Is Jesus honored? (1 John 4:1-3)

Is Satan's kingdom losing ground? (Mark 3:22-30)

Is Jesus' kingdom gaining ground? (Mark 3:22-30)

Now, let's take a look at the IHOPU Awakening as an example. This supernatural movement began on November 11, 2009 and is still going strong as I write this article six months later. The primary theme has been hearts being healed and discovering the love of Jesus in a very personal, real way. There have also been physical healings and students are being set free from addictions. The net result has been students falling in love with Jesus.

Now let's apply the Bible's discernment test...

The Biblical Discernment Test: Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

Fruit of the Tree: GOOD

Jesus Honored: YES

Satan's Kingdom Losing Ground: YES

Jesus' Kingdom Gaining Ground: YES

That was fun. Now, let's use our discernment test on a supernatural phenomenon occurring in our day.

We will take a look at the manifestation of gold fillings as well as gold crowns. These are signs and wonders putting God's mark on people in a way that can only be explained by the supernatural. These are very personal manifestations that tell the people to whom they occur that God is real and that God cares about them. In this way, God becomes a very real, powerful being in the lives of these people instead of an abstract idea somewhere up there in heaven. People are giving their lives over to God as they realize that He is extremely real. Each time they look in the mirror and see the gold filling they remember that God does miracles in their life and worship him and give Him all their worries.

Now let's apply the Bible's discernment test to these miracles...

Fruit of the Tree: GOOD

Jesus Honored: YES

Satan's Kingdom Losing Ground: YES

Jesus' Kingdom Gaining Ground: YES

Now, let's look at one more spiritual movement.

There is a man in Florida named Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda who claims to be the modern-day manifestation of Jesus Christ. He also claims the title of Antichrist. He discourages anyone from worshiping the Jesus that most Christians worship since he believes that he is Jesus' replacement and claims to be even better than Jesus. Furthermore, he teaches that there is no devil, no hell, and no sin – even murder is not a sin according to this man's teaching. He encourages his followers to put away all feelings of guilt and to enjoy every pleasure that life has to offer including gluttony, satisfying all sexual appetites, and so on. He also teaches that there is no point in praying to God. His followers are encouraged to demonstrate against Christian churches and whole Christian denominations because they are classified by him as false religions.

Now, let's apply the Bible's discernment test to this movement:

Fruit of the Tree: BAD

Jesus Honored: NO

Satan's Kingdom Losing Ground: NO

Jesus' Kingdom Gaining Ground: NO

This test can be easily applied to any supernatural or prophetic movement. Just be careful to look at the evidence without your personal theology and biases coloring your perspective.

In addition to using the biblical discernment test outlined above, I also encourage you to examine scripture to see if a movement or a message clearly contradicts the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early apostles or not. While you are studying the scriptures, remember to be open to seeing the scriptures in a fresh light and be careful to comprehend the point of what the writer of the scripture was really trying to say.

Jose Miranda, mentioned above, tries to confuse people by quoting from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where it says "everything is permissible." He takes these words out of context to scripturally support his teaching that there is no sin. He conveniently ignores the other words of Paul written just three verses before the verse Jose likes to quote: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

We can also see that Jose's claims directly contradict with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24: "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Can You Recognize the Children of God?

Our biases and personal experiences often cause us to make wrong judgments. For example, imagine you are worshiping in your usual spot in your church one Sunday morning when you see a man fall to his knees and begin shaking and crying and then laughing. We can only see in the natural realm and too often we make spiritual judgments based on our five natural senses. We might even throw in some scripture to justify our judgments. We might think to ourselves, "That man is not being self-controlled and he is not worshiping in an orderly fashion." In this way, we stand in judgment over that man based on our superficial understanding of what is happening. We can only see what is happening on the outside in the realm of nature. What we don't know is that this man is

The Biblical Discernment Test: Correctly Discerning the Genuine from the Counterfeit

having a supernatural encounter with Jesus. If we saw Jesus like this man was seeing him, we would understand how appropriate it is to be on our knees shaking with strong emotions before the feet of the Living God who created the universe and has poured out his life on the cross to rescue us into his heavenly kingdom.

Please beware of nitpicking a true work of God. Don't miss out on supporting a genuine move of God in our day.

The Bible encourages us to discern, but we need to be able to discern correctly. We should follow the biblical discernment test outlined above so we don't fall into the trap of the Pharisees who called the true work of God in their day the work of Satan and became guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, they rejected Jesus Christ the Son of God. How many children of God have we rejected and criticized because we were judging them by our personal standards instead of following the Bible's discernment test?

I love all of my brothers and sisters in Christ and plead with each one of you to be slow to condemn the men and women who are trying to serve God. No one except Jesus is perfect. But isn't the Good News that we are loved and accepted by God through Christ's finished work on the cross despite our imperfections? Isn't it wonderful that God has chosen to use imperfect jars of clay to carry his treasures? (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Can we carry in our lives the attitude of Christ who looked down from the cross to those mocking him and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

I am so glad that we serve a merciful God who is eager to forgive us of all our sins. He knows our hearts and understands our motives, but he wants to give us his heart and he wants his goals to be what drives us. Let's put away our divisive attitudes and truly love and lift one another up in the spirit of humility and grace.

The standard for our unity is the unity between the Son and the Father in the holy trinity. Hear Jesus' words: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their [the apostle's] message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-21) Now, Jesus and God the Father enjoy complete harmony and unity and share a single purpose. Jesus desires that we all get along with one another and support one another just as Jesus and the Father are completely unified. Furthermore, we are meant to be completely unified with Jesus and the Father. All of us – Jesus, the Father, you, and me – share the same Spirit and should be completely unified. When this happens, the world will truly see the body of Christ in the earth.

Thank you for reading. I hope much blessing is yours as a result of this information.

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