

TESTING THE SPIRITS

By Allon Maxwell

I have spent much of the last 20 years, examining the claims of Pentecostalism in depth.

Initially this was because I had come to believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were still meant for Christians today and I was attracted by their claims to have received the "baptism with the Holy Spirit", promised by Jesus to His disciples.

It was not long before the emphasis of my search changed.

Although I continued to believe (and still do today) that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for all true disciples of Jesus, in all time, I soon discovered that amongst those who claimed the "gifts", all was not as it should be.

Amongst these people I needed "the ability to distinguish between spirits.

[\(1 Corinthians 12:10\)](#)

There was a real Biblical need to heed the Apostle John's warning that not all that is claimed to be the work of the Holy Spirit, is truly from God. [\(1 John 4:1\)](#) That warning, I discovered, is as much for us today as it was for those to whom John initially wrote his epistles.

I have searched the Scriptures. I have listened to many of the famous preachers amongst them. I have read countless books. I have visited many churches and spoken to many Pentecostals. I have ministered to some of their victims.

It was NOT all totally bad. I met many sincere and gracious people.

But it was not all good either!

At the best, there is such a difficult mixture of truth and error, that it often becomes almost impossible to decide whether one is dealing with a Christian still growing, or with a serpent more subtle than the rest of God's creation. [\(Genesis 3:1\)](#) At its worst, one is confronted directly with the powers of darkness. Most of it leaves me with deep reservations about the true source of the experience claimed.

I heard promises of healings and other miracles, made in the name of Jesus, which were not kept.

I heard false prophecies, claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, which did not come to pass.

I met and counselled several victims of one leader who used "prophecies" claimed to be from God, to direct attractive young women in his church to sleep with him.

I heard false gospels and other teaching which plainly contradicted the most fundamental truths of the Bible.

I investigated "miracles" which proved to be false.

I observed some "ministries" in action, disguised as servants of righteousness, whose "gifts" were identical with those of spiritists and mediums and other practitioners of occult arts.

I saw "miracle workers" deceiving gullible audiences with the same arts of illusion found in stage magicians.

I encountered ministers who promote the experience of the "gift" by using very subtle techniques of suggestion and manipulation of minds, which have no place in the Bible, and are to be avoided at all costs by those whose goal is TRUTH.

I have had to stand by and watch, helpless, while good friends ignored the danger signals and allowed themselves to be deceived by these ministers. I have watched some of these friends "give heed to deceitful spirits" (1 Timothy 4:1) and make a shipwreck of their faith.

I have been there myself, on the threshold of the occult, to which these techniques can sometimes (but not always) open the door. It was only by the grace of God that I escaped without harm, but with enough frightening experience to take the warning seriously in future!

I have ministered to many who have been severely emotionally and mentally damaged by their experience amongst Pentecostals, including some who were brought to the edge of insanity, others who came under deep occult bondage, and even a few who became demon possessed.

I met Catholic Charismatics, who claimed that their experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit has confirmed to them all the teachings of their church. I learned of those extreme Pentecostal churches whose speaking in tongues is accompanied by the handling of poisonous snakes and the drinking of poison, to demonstrate their "faith".

I encountered wishful thinking, self-deception, grand fraud, skilful lies and self-promoting king-sized egos driven by totally selfish ambition.

I discovered huge financial empires and independent "Miracle Ministries", where the content of the preaching revealed men who were clearly much more interested in the size of the collection than in the spiritual welfare of their hearers.

I encountered the "Prosperity Gospel", so common amongst them, which encourages covetousness in the worst way.

Even amongst those who were not guilty of the worst things mentioned above, I found many with "itching ears", accompanied by a disturbing readiness to be deceived. Most were determined not to recognise the problems at all. Others who did see the problems were unwilling to face the implications.

But All of these spoke in tongues, and they all told me that I should too, in order to be a real Christian like them!

WHY SHOULD I ACCEPT AS REAL, any spirit which claims to be from the HOLY God, when it is accompanied by any of the UNHOLY things to which God opened my eyes when I prayed for ability to discern between the true and the false.

Now, we must be very careful what we do with all this information.

Even if we do rightly reject the counterfeit spirit which lies behind the things described above, there remains the need for TRUE DISCIPLES of Jesus to find a real experience of the real Holy Spirit. It is essential that we do not allow ourselves to be deceived by the counterfeit.

IT IS EQUALLY ESSENTIAL THAT WE DO NOT ALLOW OUR RECOGNITION OF THE COUNTERFEIT TO CLOUD OUR VISION OF THE TRUTH.

The conclusion that I have reached about all this is, I am certain, from God. *"Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world."* (1 John 4:1)

Each of us is individually responsible before God to obey that commandment, prayerfully and with pure motives, wanting nothing less than THE TRUTH.
