“What is the Spiritual Gift of Discernment?”

I was reading some of Probe’s responses to e-mails and came across a message which touched on discernment as a spiritual gift (“Do You Know Why My Dreams Come True?”). Over the years I have noticed that I often get what I classify as a “gut reaction” to people, particularly in Christian settings. I seem to detect, almost immediately, whether a person is sincere or a phony. Amazingly, I am almost always correct in my initial reaction, though it sometimes takes years before that reaction is confirmed. However, rather than attribute such feelings to the Holy Spirit, I have always seen them as a prideful or fleshly response to some subconscious cue I get from the other person’s behavior. Could you elaborate on discernment as a spiritual gift? What exactly is it, how does it work and what is its purpose? And, most importantly, how can one determine whether they, in fact, have such a gift? Scripture references would be helpful.

I’m delighted to hear from you! I thank the Lord every time I hear a believer recognizes they have the gift of discernment because the body of Christ desperately needs this “early warning system.” Unfortunately, it’s been my experience that many people dismiss any spiritual gifts they can’t understand or grasp naturalistically—in other words, that are so supernatural in origin and manifestation they can’t be explained any other way. So we lose out BIG when they are not encouraged or exercised.

The gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10) is a supernatural ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, between holiness and evil.

Just as counterfeit money experts can quickly distinguish phony money from the real thing, those with the gift of

discernment can distinguish holy and unholy spirits and discern truth from lies. A person with this gift can spot a phony before others do. It's been my experience that they can also tell when someone is lying. When you ask them, "But how do you KNOW?" they just shrug and say, "I just know. I don't know how I know, it's just there in my spirit." Proof that it's the Holy Spirit's empowering is given when they are continuously validated in their assessment.

This is NOT the same thing as a "psychic ability." Deut. 18:10-14 sternly forbids any involvement with spiritism. Only believers in Jesus Christ have this supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit.

1 Tim. 4:1 says that in latter days, deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons will come, so the important role of the gift of discernment is to identify those spirits and doctrines.

A discerning spirit tests the spirits with this rule of scripture:
"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God." (1 John 4:2,3)

Leslie B. Flynn writes in his book *19 Gifts of the Spirit*, "Any relegating of Jesus Christ to an inferior spot less than the incarnate Son of God, the crucified and resurrected Savior, means that spirit is not of God."

This is helpful to know when we are analyzing and evaluating things we hear and see in the spiritual domain (for example, when watching Oprah's New Age friends on her show). But just as important, though, is the exercise of this gift in our everyday lives. Those who have the gift of discernment have told me it's like an internal alarm bell going off. Some examples:

• Our church used to be located on a busy street where panhandlers often came by with a sob story about needing cash for their babies in the hospital or some other pretense. One of the people who worked in the office had the gift of discernment and, after spending just a couple of moments talking to these people, she could tell which ones really needed help and which ones were looking for money for booze. (If they were truly in need, there really would be a baby in the hospital, for example.)

• A friend took her 4-year-old son to see an art exhibit adjacent to art museum in Corpus Christi, Texas. The moment they entered the exhibits tent, her son stopped dead in his tracks. “Mommy, we can’t go in there. This place is bad.” Teri sensed the exact same presence of evil. They never saw a single piece of art before turning around and leaving. It turned out to be sponsored by a cult. Both mother and son later realized they have the gift of discernment.

• My husband Ray met a popular evangelical preacher at a dinner, but had a profoundly uncomfortable reaction to the man. (The word “slimeball” kept coming to mind.) There was no apparent reason, but it was a gut response. To be honest, this was before I realized he had the gift of discernment, and I dismissed his reaction as a critical spirit. The man was later removed from his pulpit for his unrepentant adulterous lifestyle.

We have found these questions helpful in determining if one has this gift:

• Do you have an internal alarm that goes off when you encounter something phony or evil?
• Even when you’re the only one who senses something wrong, is your “intuition” eventually validated?
• Do you (and others) consider yourself a good judge of character?

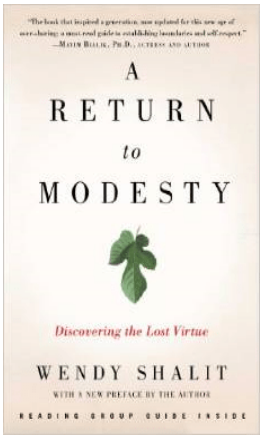
I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

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"Is It a Sin To Wear A Bikini?"

On a Christian site, someone said that it is a sin to wear a bikini. I do not agree because I went sailing the other day and I was the only one not wearing a bikini and the men on the boat did not gaze at the women wearing bikinis. I do not think bikinis are immodest because they can be appropriate when swimming, just not for walking around on the street or other public places.



I would like to direct you to Wendy Shalit's book *A Return to Modesty*, which covers the subject of modesty (and immodesty) better than anything I've ever read. It is consistent with a Christian world view even though the author is not a Christian.

In my opinion, wearing a bikini is sinful under most circumstances because the purpose of it is to show off as much flesh as possible while still covering the absolute essentials

of genitals and nipples. There is nothing God-honoring about bikinis and much that is gratifying to the flesh: for men to leer and for women to show off their bodies. Scripture calls us to live and dress modestly, not to gratify the flesh. It calls us to do everything to the glory of God: wearing bathing suits that are designed to cause men to lust and women to publicly display their bodies is the opposite of glorifying God.

If the men on your sailboat didn't gaze at the women wearing bikinis, I would suggest that they may have been desensitized. Or perhaps they were just wearing sunglasses and you didn't notice their eyes! <smile>

I will add a disclaimer. There is nothing at all sinful in a wife wearing a bikini if *only* her husband will see her in it. Showing off her body to please him is part of the pleasure of sex that God intends for married couples to enjoy. See "The Song of Solomon" in the Old Testament for biblical evidence of that.

I'm glad you asked.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"How Can a Christian Be Superstitious?"

Sue, I have a Christian friend who is highly superstitious. This is very surprising to me. I would like to be able to give him scriptural references which apply to this. I cannot understand how he reconciles the sovereignty of God with

superstition. He actually thinks that things like "knocking on wood" have affect on the outcome of situations. He is also highly intelligent. If you know if any articles which address this, I would appreciate that information as well.

I share your incredulity at your friend's belief in both superstition and a sovereign God!

Here are two powerful scriptures that I think are eye-opening concerning superstitious Christians:

Exodus 20:2-5 – The first commandment:

> *"I am the LORD your God . . . You shall have no other gods before me.*
>
> *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*
>
> *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . . "*

Being superstitious is to trust in an act, like knocking on wood or not stepping on a crack, instead of in God. It is nothing less than idolatry! (This is why astrology is also wrong, also idolatrous—it is trusting in the stars instead of the Star-Creator!) When we trust in a superstition instead of in God, we are making it into an idol.

The other scripture is in 2 Kings 1:3:

> *"But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, `Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?'"*

I think this verse makes it clear that consulting (and of course, trusting) anything other than the one true God is an

insult and affront to God.

I'll be interested in hearing his response to this information . . .

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"How Should A Christian Think About Alcohol?"

There are people who I am close to that believe having an occasional drink (keeping in mind that they aren't drinking to get drunk) is okay.

Personally, in the short amount of time I've been alive, I have seen nothing but bad things produced from drinking alcohol (whether the purpose is to get drunk or not). Which is why I have made the decision to stay away from it. My fiance has a different opinion. I know I can't push my convictions on others, but if we are to "become one" (which is what God has communicated to us both) then how is it possible for one of us to drink (just a little) and the other not drink?

Throughout the Bible it talks about wine; Jesus drank wine. How is the wine from back then different from now (if it is different)? Is it okay to drink alcohol upon occasion (New Year's, weddings, celebrations)? What do you believe about people that are called into the ministry that drink (on occasion)? I would appreciate any advice or references that you could send my way.

Let me give you some thoughts which hopefully are an accurate

assessment of the question from the Bible's point of view.

First of all, the Bible never indicates that drinking wine (as well as other liquids with alcoholic content) is a sin. You have mentioned the fact that Jesus drank wine. In fact, He was accused by His enemies of being a "wine-bibber," or wine-drinker; that is, He was habitually observed doing this. Jesus admits that He has. When He compares His ministry lifestyle with that of John the Baptist's He says, "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!'" (Matthew 11:18,19).

We actually have an account in John 2 where John describes the wedding at Cana (which Jesus and the disciples attended) and lays out in detail the fact that the hosts had run out of wine. You know the story. At His mother's request for Him to help, Jesus ordered the servants to fill up seven huge clay pots with water, which He turned into wine.

Was this grape juice, or wine? The context tells us which. After this newly-created wine was served, the headwaiter came to the bridegroom and complimented him: "Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; but you have kept the good wine until now!" (John 2:10). Every bartender knows instantly what this man is saying: "Serve the good wine first, and then, when people have become affected by it, and their taste has been dulled, serve them the cheap, inferior wine."

Another instance which lets us know that these ancient wines contained alcohol is confirmed from the lips of Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has just fallen upon the believers and they were empowered miraculously to speak in other languages. Since there were Jews present from all over the Mediterranean world (cf. Acts 2:9-11) all of these different people who spoke different languages heard the

gospel spoken in their own tongue. They are amazed at this and some of those present suggest that these Christians are drunk (2:13). But Peter comes to their rescue and says, “Men of Judea,. . .let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are **not drunk** as you suppose, for it is **only the third hour of the day!**” The Jewish day begins at 6:00 A.M., so it is only 9:00 in the morning and Peter is reminding them that it was too early for them, or any other men, to be drunk yet.

Fermentation is also implied in our Lord’s discussion about not pouring new wine into an old wineskin (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37). The process is as follows: You kill a sheep or a goat. You take the skin of say, the hind leg. You tie the bottom tightly so it won’t leak, and you have a nice flask. The skin is new and pliable, a “green skin.” You bring freshly crushed grape juice from the winepress, and pour it into your wineskin. Then you tie the top. Inside, the grape juice ferments and becomes wine. Since the skin is pliable, it expands and the pressure builds up inside. Then it is hung up in a cool place, a cellar, just as wine is attended to today, and two or three years later, you drink it. During that storage time, the skin, in its expanded state hardens, and becomes rigid.

Jesus’ point is that you would never take this old wine skin after you have drunk all the wine in it and recycle the wineskin with more new wine. The fermentation process would burst it. The application Jesus is making alludes to the fact that what He is proclaiming, the New Covenant, cannot be contained in the old “wineskin” of the Jewish Law system. The book of Hebrews personifies this same vivid contrast between the Old Mosaic Law system and its replacement with the Gospel of Grace found in Christ Jesus.

I hope with the above, we have proven our point that the wine in the days of Jesus did the same thing to those who drank it as it does to those who drink too much wine today.

Some Christians who do not wish to believe that there is any alcoholic beverage mentioned in the Bible and seek an alternative have suggested that "new wine" (*gleukos)* actually means "grape juice." However, this is the exact word used in Acts 2:13 associated with their accusation of "drunkeness."

On the other hand, while drinking wine is not a sin in the Bible, getting drunk definitely *is*. There is an extended passage in the Proverbs warning people about the danger of wine:

> *Who has woe? Who has sorrow?*
> *Who has contentions? Who has complaining?*
> *Who has wounds without cause?*
> *Who has redness of eyes?*
> *Those who linger long over wine,*
> *Those who go to taste mixed wine.*
> *Do not look on the wine when it is red,*
> *When it sparkles in the cup,*
> *When it goes down smoothly;*
> *At the last it bites like a serpent,*
> *And stings like a viper.*
> *Your eyes will see strange things,*
> *And your mind will utter perverse things.*
> *And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea,*
> *Or like the one who lies down on the top of a mast.*
> *They struck me, but I did not become ill;*
> *They beat me, but I did not know it.*
> *When shall I awake?*
> *I will seek another drink. (Proverbs 23:39-35)*

Drunkenness is mentioned many times in both Old and New Testaments in a negative light. Get a concordance and look under "drink" and "drunk." You'll see what I mean. Drunkenness is also included in the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. It is also mentioned by Paul in the context

of Christian leadership in the Church. One of the qualifications for elders is "not *addicted to wine*" (1 Timothy 3:3). This is repeated in Titus 1:7. I take it that there is a distinction between drinking in moderation and addiction. I don't think Jesus was addicted to wine, do you? But He drank wine. And here is where it gets "fuzzy." When do you pass the point when you qualify as either drunk or addicted? I think the question that needs to be continually asked if one drinks is **"Do I have it, or does it have me?"** And there is a danger here, as we saw in the Proverbs passage above. We could ask the same question about money, or television, or food, or travel, or sports, or exercise, and on and on. The Bible seems to call for *moderation*, for an awareness that things can *gain control* over us which will be detrimental to our life, our family, our ministry.

Most of us would like for the world to be black and white. Clear-cut. No gray. But gray is a biblical color. All of these things I have mentioned above fall not in a "yes/no" pattern, but a "maybe/maybe not" pattern. We could place these into an area we might call "doubtful things." The signature passage on this is Romans 14. And I think this passage speaks directly to the communication you have described you are having with your fiancé. Let's look at some verses:

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge another man's servant?" (14:1-4)

Use the word "wine" or "alcoholic beverage" and "drink" and re-read the passage. Both parties have a responsibility. The one who "eats" is not to look on the other with *contempt*. The one who does not "eat" is not to *judge* the one who does. God is able to bless both people though they do different things.

“One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. *Let every man be fully convinced in his own mind*“(v.5). It is okay to hold different positions on some of these things, and neither should judge the other.

But Paul brings in another factor: “Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather determine this—that no one is to put an *obstacle* or a *stumbling block* in a brother’s way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that *nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it IS unclean*” (13,14).

“For if because of food (or drink) your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a *good* thing be spoken of as evil, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. . . So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food (or drink). All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats (drinks) and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to *drink wine*, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats (drinks), because his eating (drinking) is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. . . .Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just *please ourselves.* Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself” (14:15-15:3).

What we have in this wonderful passage gives both freedom and restraint. God has provided many wonderful things for the human race, including wine “to make glad the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15). Yet we have additional responsibilities to behave in such a way that we might not offend another’s

conscience. There is what we might call the “Law of Love” which would make us careful not to exercise our freedom at the expense of someone else’s expectation of us. A second law might be called the “Law of Expediency.” Paul says, “All things are *lawful*, but not all things are *expedient* (I Corinthians 6:12)” In other words, if I have freedom to have a glass of wine, I still have to look to the leading of the Holy Spirit to help me decide whether it would be expedient in a particular context for me to exercise my freedom.

So _____, I would suggest that you and your fiancé get together and look at this material and have a good discussion about it. I would not make this issue the pivot upon which your shared life together will turn. If he wants a glass of wine at a meal at home, you do not have to have one too, but you also should not judge him for having one. If it becomes something habitual, and seems to be gaining greater control, I think you have a right to talk to him about it and express your concern. “Becoming one” in a marriage is not something based upon both people thinking the same things or doing the same things. It is about being open to one another and sharing your lives. It is possible for him to have a glass of wine and you deciding not to.

The word “becoming” is most important. It is a process. It takes many years for a couple to become one. Couples who have “pulled in the harness” for thirty or forty years together are the ones who best exhibit this “oneness,” since they know each other so well, and have fought their “fights,” and made their adjustments to each other, and there is a harmony between them that has been hammered out over their married life.

You are just embarking on that great journey called marriage. Realize that you both bring what you are to the relationship. You will discover that you are very different people Sometimes those differences will bring friction. You will rub on each other. This is part of the process of any meaningful relationship. Your differences should not be considered a

threat, but rather a union which should be viewed as complementary, rather than competitive. Someone has said that marriage is like a tennis match. But it's not singles; it's doubles! You are both on the same side of the net giving all *you've* got—each of you, to make your relationship and your marriage a winner.

I hope this helps answer your question, _____.

Warm regards in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

See Also:

- "Is It OK for Christians to Drink in Moderation? Didn't Jesus Drink?"
- "Jesus Contributed to Drunkenness!"