

+ Desires of the Heart: Themes of Ignatian Spirituality +

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

The tension of good and evil; consolation and desolation

BACKGROUND

Throughout his spiritual life St Ignatius discovered the reality of good and evil and how the “good spirit” and “evil spirit” worked within him. He jotted down these tensions and came up with a list of ways each of these spirits pull us in one direction or another. But first we must establish **consolation** and **desolation**:

Consolation - *“every increase in hope, faith, and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things...” - [316] SpEx*

Desolation - *“darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of agitations and temptations... without hope, without love... tepid...” - [317] SpEx*

Evil Spirit	Good Spirit
Works like a “false lover” who justifies keeping sin, fears, problems, and temptations a secret. This spirit loves the darkness.	Bringing secrets into the Light (through a close friend or spiritual director) crushes the power of the evil spirit and removes its grip on us.
Works as “false angel of light” that can lead you further away from God by giving you false consolation. Evil appears good.	If you are moving <i>away</i> from God the good spirit will sting your conscience, raise doubts, and encourage you to change course.
If you are moving <i>toward</i> God the false spirit will attempt to alter your course by giving you doubts or anxiety about your good choices.	If you are moving <i>toward</i> God the good spirit will reassure you in your good choices and give you peace and joy about it.
The false spirit seeks out your weak points and exploits them; attacks them to pull you away from God.	Ask God to help you be aware of your weak points to resist attack. In times of consolation prepare yourself for times of desolation.

RESOURCES

[What’s Your Decision?](#) - A book from Loyola Press that gives clear rules and examples for discerning the spirits in an Ignatian way.

goo.gl/kGfo2Z - All of Ignatius’ rules for Discernment of Spirits clearly laid out.

godinallthings.com/discernment - Discernment resources

“What I say is this: let the Spirit direct your lives, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants.” - Galatians 5:16-17a (GNT)