

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Recognizing And Responding To The Holy Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold/perceive Him or know/recognize Him; you know/recognize Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”
John 14:16-17

“...the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, in order that we may know the things freely-given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, ...spiritual-ones judging-together spiritual things. ¹⁴ But a natural person does not accept/welcome/entertain the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to experientially-know them, because they are discerned spiritually. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual carefully-scrutinizes all things, yet he himself is carefully-scrutinized by no one. ¹⁶ ...we have the mind of Christ. ³¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual ones, but as to fleshly, ...as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. In fact, you are still not able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and do you not walk according to humanity?”
1 Corinthians 2:11-3:3

It seems that the main difference between people who are spiritually disconnected, and those who are seeing God at work in their lives has to do with their ability to *recognize, acknowledge and respond to God's activity in their lives*. Even before the fuller ministry of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost, the apostles were more aware of and tuned into His activity around them than the average person. Jesus said that this sensitivity would be heightened after the Holy Spirit was sent to them to be their Comforter, and would dwell within them.

Certainly, the dullness of the unbeliever is to be expected. They are often not even open to the activity of God's Spirit. To them, such talk *makes no sense*. It seems like *foolishness, superstition, emotionalism or an over-active imagination*. They have no time for it, and so they dismiss it. They give it no serious attention. They are unwilling to honestly examine the things of God. They live life by what they see and know. They live by their wits and earthly wisdom. [Actually, it is not quite fair to lump all unbelievers into this category. There are many unbelievers who are aware of and attentive to the spiritual world around them. Apart from the guidance of God's Word, a clear, biblical understanding of the victory of Jesus Christ, and of the realities of the spiritual warfare that intersects with their lives, such “spiritually-minded” unbelievers are ill-equipped to discern truth from error in spiritual matters. It is often the case that such people either are drawn into a fascination with spiritual phenomena, or they are fearful of it. Both of these extremes can open the door to being manipulated or controlled by spirits that are not from God. In either case, an over-fascination with, or superstitious fear of, the spiritual world, can be a distraction to keep us from focusing on the more important matter: a relationship with God Himself.] The term Paul uses in I Corinthians 2 for the “natural man”, is literally, “soulish”, someone who is dealing with life from their own perspective and resources.

This “soulish” type of person is contrasted to someone who is “spiritual”, ...one who values, investigates, and carefully scrutinizes all things in light of spiritual reality. To such a person, life is not just about the material and tangible world. There is more to reality than meets the natural eye, the physical senses, or human wisdom and understanding. The word for “discern, appraise or evaluate” is an interesting word. It implies a process of questioning, investigation, examining and evaluating. Of the 16 times the word occurs in the NT, it is used of “examining someone by questioning”, as in a courtroom setting nine times (Lk. 23:14; Acts 4:9; 12:9; 24:8; 28:18; I Cor. 4:3 [2x]; 4:9:3). Twice Paul tells people to eat food placed before them without “asking questions” as to its origins or contents (I Cor. 10:25,27). In I Corinthians 14:24, this word describes how someone with a gift of prophecy may speak things that will “call others to account”. Then, it is used of the Berean Jews and God-fearers, who were “more open-minded than the ones in Thessalonica, because they welcomed the message with all eagerness/willingness and ‘searched/examined/investigated/questioned-by-study’ the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). From these examples, you can see that the “discerning/appraising” ability that the spiritual person in I Cor. 2:14,15 seems to have is not the product of some spooky, intuitive, spell-bound experience. It is a skill, insight or recognition of something that is learned over a process of investigation, questioning, study and examination.

This fits with Hebrews 5:14. The spiritually-mature person has moved beyond the “milk-diet” that new Christians need. New believers need someone to spell things out for them, plainly, because they can't yet “connect the dots” or understand deeper-level truths. They need the “pre-digested, simplified version”, or they do not grasp what the Scriptures mean, nor do they recognize what God is doing in their lives. They need others to “nurse them along” by pointing out what they cannot yet perceive on their own. (You can therefore see the importance of discipleship and/or interactive Body-life for a new believer.) A spiritually-mature person has trained his or her faculties-of-perception, or abilities-to-thoroughly-discern what is good-and-healthy from what is bad-and-unhealthy. How

do they do this? They applied themselves to learn, become familiar with, and even become experientially-skilled-and-tested-in the Word of righteousness. In other words, **they put the Word of God into their lives by study and application. That familiarization and application of the Word of God is not an end in itself, however. It is the means to an end.** In Acts 20:32 the end purpose of the Word is *to build us up and give us our inheritance.* In John 8:31-36, the purpose for continuing in Jesus' Word is *to experientially-know the truth and find freedom from the power of sin.* In II Timothy 3:16,17, the purpose of the Scriptures in our life is *to train us in righteousness and equip us for everything God wants us to do.* **The end purpose in this passage, Hebrews 5, is to develop our faculties of discernment.** Note that these mature believers had a conscious work-out plan. They had a strategy, and they worked hard at this. What was their strategy? Let me give you a literal, amplified translation: "the solid food is for the mature, the ones on account of repetition, practice, doing-over-and-over-again are-having faculties-of-discernment having-been-trained-through-exercise toward a thorough-discernment both of good and evil." **Bottom line: If you want to become skilled at discerning things, you need to practice discerning things.**

There is something else that is a parallel between Hebrews 5 and I Corinthians 2:14-3:3. Both passages describe a state of immaturity that has gone on far past what should be normal. Both passages describe people who are believers who seem to have become stuck in living by the flesh. **They are not moving on toward maturity, walking in deeper discernment and victory. They seem to be stuck in a state of spiritual dullness and limited understanding** (Heb. 5:11; I Cor. 3:1-3). They can only handle spiritual milk, even though they have been believers for some time. Paul has a term for this kind of believer. They are "fleshly". **Just as there are "soulish" people and "spiritual" people, there are "fleshly" people. Like the "natural-soulish" person, the "fleshly" person is not thinking of spiritual things. He is thinking of fleshly things.** Because of the focus on self, self-gratification and selfish-living, there is little focus on living by the Spirit. **The Spirit, and the life of the Spirit, are strange and unfamiliar concepts to this person.** He or she may have trusted in Christ, but they are living the same way they did before. Their mind is set on the flesh, so **they disregard the Spirit, the responsibilities of growing in Christ, and they are dull or oblivious to much of what God is doing in their lives.** Until they come to a place of repentance, they will likely continue on this way.

Are we guilty of bypassing the Spirit, because we dis-regard, de-value or see no need for Him in our lives? **Are we like the natural man, who feels that the Spirit is not really necessary to how I live?** Hear me in what I say: **Jesus said that you need the Spirit!** He is your Teacher, your Helper, your Guide. You are to learn to walk with Him. He told the disciples to "wait for the promise of the Father". **You cannot be an obedient follower of Jesus Christ and minimize the Holy Spirit in your life!**

Jesus said that the world could not receive the Helper, because it did not perceive Him, or recognize Him. The same is true for us. **How can we "take" or "engage with" the Holy Spirit, if we do not recognize His activity in our lives? The first thing we must do is prepare our hearts for God's working.** We come right back to John the Baptist's message: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight his paths" (Mk. 1:3). If you can see you have given little thought or value to the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life, if you have dis-regarded Him, confess that to God, and ask Him to clarify your mind and heart. Ask Him to unite your heart with His. Apologize to the Holy Spirit, and humbly invite Him to be your Helper, Teacher and Guide. Ask Him to begin to make you aware of His presence in your life. **Put aside distractions, and focus more on raising your consciousness to focus on God's activity in your life.** Set aside times during the day to simply ask Him to reveal Himself in your life. Do not fill up every moment with activity or entertainment. Give time to Him. Spend some time in His word, or in unhurried prayer and reflection. Write down any new thoughts you may be able to identify. **Pray repeatedly and diligently for a fuller and more conscious experience of His working in your life.** Jesus taught His disciples to pray repeatedly and unceasingly for the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:1-13). Ask in faith, knowing that this IS God's will. He will *certainly* bring it to pass. **Partner up with someone else,** or a group, to seek God together, and to share what new insights or experiences you may receive. Many times, as we share, someone *else* will be able to identify when God has done something, when we may be largely oblivious to it. **Be quick to obey any promptings that you judge may be from God.** Remember, you are trying to develop discernment. You are "testing out by trial to discover the will of God" (Rom. 12:2). It is by virtue of practice, repetition, and taking new risks that we discover new insights and experience God. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32). We honor God with our obedience. We say by our actions that He is important to us, and we put Him before other interests or demands upon your time. **Avoid doing things that you know are wrong, or are grievous to God.** If you sin, be quick to acknowledge your sin to God and get restored. **Finally, wait with expectation and eagerness.** The word for "wait" means "expect, hope, hopefully-wait, look for, look with eagerness." The bottom line of faith is that "the one coming-near to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of the one seeking-Him-out" (Heb. 11:6). **Then, as you think you may be recognizing God's activity in your life, begin to take note of how He speaks to you, or leads you, so you learn from these experiences.**