

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmnc.org Today's Date: September 1, 2019

Skill and Perception in Recognizing God's Will

by Dan Trygg

“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.¹³ For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:9-14

The goal of verse nine is that we might truly grasp God's desire and intent for us, both as individuals and as a group. We saw how Paul's awareness of the blindness and lack of perception of human beings motivated him to pray unceasingly for the groups of believers with whom he had an acquaintance. There is definitely an urgency conveyed by his actions. Surely he must have observed with frustration how **some Christians never seemed to go anywhere in their spiritual lives**, ...either in terms of their personal walk with God or in terms of their usefulness and effectiveness in service..., simply **because they seemed clueless as to what was really going on**, what their relationship with God meant, or what role they were being called to play in His plan. He began to habitually pray for believers, asking God continually to stir them up to pursue growth and maturity in Christ. At a distance, or from the confines of imprisonment, there was little more that he could do. His letters, however, are a testimony that he followed up on his prayers with practical action. **Paul sent these letters to attempt to rally the people toward taking an active role in seeking God** from their side. If they became watchful and attentive, then they would be less likely to miss the ways in which God was trying to communicate with them. In addition to letters, he would often send members of his team to assist these groups in getting started (e.g., 1 Thess. 3:2; Tit. 1:1-5; Acts 19:21,22). His track record demonstrates clearly that **he did not think that it was appropriate or effective to leave new believers to themselves, without follow-up** on at least some level. Making a commitment to Christ was not the end point of his mission to people, ...it was only the beginning. **Paul could not be content until he saw each group firmly rooted and established in the Lord, and effectively serving Him.**

Another key observation about Paul's understanding of people and ministry has to do with the fact that **he did not simply “franchise” a particular method of doing ministry** in every community. He took seriously the reality that each community was different, with unique needs and opportunities, *and* that each group was dissimilar, with with its own combination of gifts and abilities. It would not be true that every method that may be effective in reaching people in one community could successfully be transferable to another community. Just as individuals with different personalities, gifts, abilities and backgrounds will not, often even *can not*, do things the same way, or with the same level of success, similarly different bodies of believers will find that God has placed them together in their unique set of circumstances to serve in ways that fit *only them*. **It was up to each group to discern together what God was calling them to do, ...as well as the responsibility of each member of the group to seek God about His desire and purpose for him or her** (Rom. 12:1-6).

This brings us to the focus of today's study. Paul prayed in Colossians 1:9, “...in order that y'all might be filled-full of the recognition of His will in/with/by all spiritual wisdom and understanding”. Obviously, there is a God-side to this equation, or Paul would not be devoting himself so much to praying on their behalf. There is also a human side, however. **Our “recognition” of God's will comes in/with/by spiritual wisdom and understanding.** We need to look into this more deeply. The slash marks between the words “in”, “with”, and “by” are there to indicate that these are all possible translation options for the underlying Greek word. Sometimes one rendering will more strongly or clearly communicate the significance of what is meant than another word option. To me, the translation “in” or “with” spiritual wisdom and understanding is less clear than the word “by”. “In” or “with” seems to indicate that the spiritual wisdom and understanding will come to us from God along with the recognition of His will. That may, in fact, be what Paul is saying, ...but it is kind of nebulous, and there is little I can do about it but pray and wait. On the other hand, **if we accept the word, “by”, as the intended meaning, then it becomes quite clear that our grasp of God's will for us depends upon, or is preceded by, spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

You may ask, “Is there something I can do about *that*?” At first glance, from our English translation, this may seem as nebulous as the previous translation. From the Greek, however, it is not. **The word translated as “wisdom” refers to knowledge leading to skillful activity. Biblically, a wise person is a savvy person. They know**

what needs to be done, and how to do it. Moreover, they are practiced and adept at doing it. **So-called “know-how” really only comes from practiced “do-how”.** This is a *skill* we are talking about, not a mental concept or idea. This is related to *doing*, not simply *imagining* or *entertaining with one’s mind*. If we plug that concept into the translation, we have “by spiritual practical-know-how, or skill”. In other words, **there are practical, hands-on things that a person can do to “tune-in”, discover, discern and recognize God’s will.** It only makes sense that if one can develop a practiced, skillful-ability concerning spiritual things, that he or she would more quickly discern God’s will in a given situation.

The next question would be, “Is it possible to train oneself to more effectively discern God’s will?” That is precisely what the writer to the Hebrews says about the mature Christian. **Those who are spiritually immature are only dependent upon “spiritual milk”, i.e, they rely only on others to do all the work of studying the Word.** Their spiritual diet consists only of the predigested food of others. They are “unaccustomed to the Word of righteousness” (5:13). **They have not invested themselves in the “do-how”, so they have not developed the “know-how”.** **By contrast, those who are spiritually mature are “ones [who] by means of practice (‘do-how’) are having the faculties of discernment having-been-trained-through-exercise toward a discernment of good and evil”** (Heb. 5:14).

The other word in the phrase from Colossians 1:9 is that “y’all might be filled-full of the recognition of His will... by... understanding”. **The word “understanding” is an interesting word-picture in Greek. It describes a “sending-together” of the various pieces of information, so that one can compare, assemble and “piece them together” into a coherent whole.** In order to do this effectively, we need exposure to as wide a sampling of sound information and experience that we can. If this is the case, then ***we ought to be doing all we can to develop this broad base of sound understanding, so that we can recognize and understand the leading of God*** in our immediate circumstance. Developing an accurate and broad base of Bible understanding, as well as past and present church history, could go a long way toward making us more discerning. Then again, being a careful observer about life, or about people who cross our paths will also give us plenty to work with. Let us not underestimate the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, either. In Isa. 11:2, He is called “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding”, the exact same words in the LXX translation as the apostle uses in this verse in Colossians. Those who seek God for wisdom will receive it. He will be our Teacher (Jn. 14:26; 16:13), if we will learn to be taught by Him.

We also need to *learn how to think more carefully and accurately, so as to avoid fallacies in reasoning* or jumping to conclusions that are unwarranted. Our ability to “assemble the pieces” in a coherent fashion depends as much upon our being wise and circumspect about our own process of reasoning as it does on our awareness of a broad base of information with which to compare what God is doing with us.

If a broad base of sound information, and a developed skill at assembling the pieces, equips us to accurately “send together” the new bits with the old effectively, wouldn’t this perception be even more accurate if we could combine the sound understanding and experience of a number of people? Yes, in fact that is what the Scriptures tell us in several places, most notably in 1 Cor. 2:12,13, where the verb in vs. 13 describes “spiritual ones judging-together (co-judging) spiritual things”. You will notice that I used the word “sound” in several of the sentences above, because not everyone that is a recognized leader necessarily has a “sound” understanding of things, nor a “sound” methodology for interpreting and understanding reality. **Those who do have a healthy and accurate perception, and who are meek and open enough to learn new pieces that they had not seen before, are invaluable as wise counselors** to help us in “sending-together” the information we have, so that we can recognize God’s desire and leading, when it comes (Prov. 11:14; 15:22). If we have an healthy interactive relationship with such people, **they will become not only resources for a broader understanding, but also *shaping tools* that God will use to teach us** to be more mature in our thinking process. We will observe how *they* go about evaluating things, and they will point out areas we missed or had not considered. God has given the Spirit to teach us this, as well (Isa. 11:2).

All this talk about spiritual wisdom and understanding may begin to sound like the world of academia, with classes, universities and seminaries, ...but this is not necessarily the case at all. While there may be much to be gained in such training, **there is no necessary correlation between academic education and the kind of practical savvy and perceptiveness that Paul is discussing.** He is concerned about learning to be mature and practiced in regard to discerning the will of God, not about writing papers, or being able to regurgitate information on tests. The writer of the book of Hebrews used the word “mature”, which indicates a development from childish, naive, undisciplined ways of looking at life to a more experienced, tested, responsible, structured way of dealing with things (1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20). **Maturity comes to those who *take responsibility for themselves* and *invest in learning the necessary skills to deal with life.*** **Spiritual maturity is no different. *Spiritual maturity does not come to the lazy and irresponsible, but to those who consciously work at developing their skills.***