

The Christian Life: God's Will

6. Knowing God's Will: What is Spiritual Understanding?

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From the **TeachingtheWord** Bible Knowledgebase
Part six of a series. Read [part five](#).

Spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding are two companion elements in knowing God's will.

In our study of the believer's knowledge of the will of God, we are considering seven truths that build upon one another, found in the original language of Colossians 1:9-12:

1. Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible.
2. Precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible.
3. Precise and correct knowledge of God's will comes because of two things - prayer and study of the Word of God.
4. Knowledge of God's will involves wisdom in the general sense.
5. Knowledge of God's will involves understanding in the specific sense, and it is an understanding that involves joining various aspects of God's revelation together in the mind.
6. The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom.
7. Knowledge of God's will has a specific purpose.

Spiritual Wisdom

In our last study, we took up point number four: *Knowledge of God's will involves wisdom in the general sense*. In other words, it has to do with general principles. We noted a division of terms that is not apparent in most English Bibles. In Colossians 1:9, Paul says the he is praying that these believers will be filled with the knowledge of God's will "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." In the original language, the adjective "spiritual" actually applies to

both nouns, wisdom and understanding. Paul is really saying, "in all spiritual wisdom, and in all spiritual understanding."

In our last study we addressed the matter of spiritual wisdom. The word Paul uses here in the original language is *sophia*, which means discernment with regard to general principles. This is the understanding that the general will of God for believers is given to us clearly in the Bible, and in all the necessary detail. The Bible gives us the general sense of right and wrong; what pleases God and does not please God; of what constitutes sound doctrine, and what constitutes heresy; of what is right and proper in the life and worship of the church, and what is not. Paul addresses these things in some detail in Colossians chapter two.

Also, the Bible gives us the general sense of how we should conduct our lives as Christians - how the Christian mind should think; what Christian character looks like; how a Christian is to conduct himself before unbelievers, in the home, in the workplace, and in relation to other believers. The general principles of spiritual wisdom will give us answers to the vast majority of questions as we seek to know the will of God.

Spiritual Understanding

But then we come to a different category in verse nine - "spiritual understanding." How does this differ from "spiritual wisdom"? The Greek word that is used here for "understanding" is *sunesis*. It is a compound word made up of the root word *hiemi*, which means "to bring", and the prefix *sun*, which means "together". So the basic meaning of the word for "understanding" in verse nine is "to bring together."

Sunesis in this context means that as a Christian you are to use your mind, employ your God-given intelligence, "to bring together" various aspects of your knowledge of God's general will as revealed in His Word, and to bring that combined knowledge to bear on a specific situation or question. The specific will of God for any given situation will always agree with the total body of truth He has set down in His Word. The better you know God's Word, the better you

will know God's general will. The better you know God's general will, the easier it will be to discern His specific guidance in your daily life.

Notice in this passage what Paul was *not* doing. He was not encouraging the Colossian believers to go off after the kind of false knowledge and wisdom that the pagans were promoting. He was not praying that they would see visions or hear voices. Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers was that they would get deeper into God's Word, and that by the power and authority of God's Word alone they would be filled with wisdom and insight concerning God's will.

He wanted them to have "all wisdom." That did not mean they were going to know everything. But it did mean that they would have all the wisdom necessary to exercise their minds in a Scripture-driven way in order to make decisions and live lives that would please God.

The Sum: Spiritual Intelligence

What the Holy Spirit through Paul is describing in Colossians 1:9 is *spiritual intelligence*. That is what God wants us to have. God does not ask you to put your mind in mothballs when you become a Christian. He does not ask you to put your intellect in the deep freeze. God does not place a premium on ignorance. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ liberates Christians to use their minds in a way that the unbeliever cannot even understand.

It is God's Word that equips believers to do this. It is God's Word that equips the Scripture-driven Christian, and the Scripture-driven church. God wants you to use your mind, driven by Scripture illuminated by the indwelling Holy Spirit, to live a godly and fruitful life for His glory. God wants this for every Christian, not just an elite group. You do not need to have a Bible college or seminary degree to be a Scripture-driven Christian who is "filled with the knowledge of His will."

In the eyes of the world, Peter and the other apostles were uneducated and untrained men. But we read in Acts chapter four that as they preached and taught in the early days of the

church, the Pharisees - the educated men of the day, but men who were lost and spiritually dead and did not know how to think God's thoughts - marveled because these uneducated, untrained apostles could preach with such power and live with such boldness. Acts 4:13 tells us that they took note of the fact that these men, Peter and John and the rest, "had been with Jesus."

The same was true in a different way of the Apostle Paul. By human standards, he was a highly educated man. But he declared this to the Galatian church, in chapter one of his epistle beginning at verse eleven: I am not giving you my own wisdom or my own understanding of things. I am giving you the knowledge of the will of God that I received directly from Jesus Christ. I have been with Jesus.

That is what we need today. We need to develop spiritual intelligence. Far too many professing Christians are in bondage to an up-and-down emotionalism or a puffed-up intellectualism. We need to be with Jesus. And the way to be with Jesus, the way to have the mind of Christ, and to thus know God's will, is to be immersed in God's Word. The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom. That point will be the topic of our next study.

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Next: [Why Are So Many Christians Confused About God's Will?](#)

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