

The Christian Life: God's Will

Knowing God's Will: What Is Spiritual Wisdom?

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Part five of a series. Read [part four](#).

Spiritual wisdom, as Paul defines it in Colossians chapter one, is God's way of providing at least ninety percent of the guidance believers need each day.

Review

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

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.

Thus far we have studied the first three.

Number one: *Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible.* That's what opens the door. Nothing else can do it. You can't know God's will unless you are a Christian. You can't know God's will unless God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within you, and that is what occurs when every Christian becomes a Christian. That is *how* you become a Christian. God the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you, regenerates you, and begins the process of conforming you more and more to the image of Christ.

Number two: *Precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible.* This is not some nebulous knowledge, but precise and correct knowledge. We saw that this is the meaning of the word that is translated "knowledge" in our English Bibles in verse nine. The common Greek word for knowledge was *gnosis*. Normally, in Greek, if you wanted to talk about knowledge, you simply used the word *gnosis*. Basic knowledge. But Paul doesn't use that word in verse nine. He says, my prayer is not that you will simply have knowledge, *gnosis* - but my desire is that you will have *epignosis* - full knowledge, complete knowledge, accurate knowledge.

Number three: *Precise and correct knowledge of God's will - knowledge that is not merely gnosis but epignosis - comes because of two things: proper prayer, and the reading and study of the Word of God.* The two are inseparable in the Christian life.

In our last article, we talked about what the Bible means by proper prayer. We looked at the model prayer given to us by our Lord in Matthew chapter six. We saw that the thematic word we can put over that entire prayer is the word *submission* - "hallowed be Thy name" - "Thy kingdom come" - "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven" - and so on. We need to get our minds and spirits properly oriented before we ask anything of God in prayer. You need to get your spiritual compass pointing to true north, as it were, pointing in the direction of desiring and seeking after accurate and complete and abundant knowledge of the will of God. That is the attitude you need to

have before you ask anything of Him. That also is the attitude you need to have before you open your Bible to read and study and absorb the truth of His Word: Father, I want You to be exalted. I want Christ to be truly preeminent in my life. I want Your will to be done, Your kingdom to have the priority, because I know that there is absolutely nothing better.

We also saw that we need to prayerfully make profitable use of Scripture - for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that each of us may be thoroughly equipped to not only know God's will, but to do it. Finally, we saw that there are three principles of God's guidance. First of all, God guides primarily through Scripture. This Book tells us how to think. This Book tells us how to live. And secondly, God also guides through circumstances, through providence. He is working all things together for His glory and for our good. But we also saw a third principle of God's guidance, and that is the fact that God's guidance through circumstances never contradicts God's guidance from the unchangeable Scriptures.

And therefore, if you think your circumstances are dictating that you need to do something that is contrary to Scripture, then you are letting circumstances become your authority instead of Scripture. Scripture governs how we are to deal with circumstances, not the other way around. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that it is Scripture that is the discerner, or the critic, of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Scripture must govern our comprehension of the circumstances that God sets before us. Circumstances are never an excuse to compromise the Scriptural way of thinking, the Scriptural way of conducting our lives. Every Christian must first and always be a Scripture-driven Christian.

The Nature of Spiritual Wisdom

This brings us to proposition number four: *Knowledge of God's will involves wisdom in the general sense.* In other words, it has to do with general principles.

In order for us to understand what the Apostle Paul is saying about this, we need to remember once again some of the cultural background of the book of Colossians. The Colossian believers were dealing with some serious challenges to their new-found Christian faith. One of them was the false teaching of an early form of Gnosticism. The false teachers promised the Colossian believers that they could be part of a special "in" group, with special knowledge that was not to be found in Scripture. These false teachers used words like knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding, so Paul uses these very words in his letter to make his case against them.

False teachers are like their father the Devil. They misappropriate the Bible's vocabulary, but they don't use the Bible's definitions. The Biblical definitions of the terms Paul is using were well established in the Old Testament Scriptures. Look at the Psalms in particular, and the early chapters of Proverbs. They are full of the terms "knowledge" - "wisdom" - and "understanding." And they give the definitions of those words that Paul uses here in Colossians.

Look, for example, at Proverbs chapter two, beginning at verse one, where all three of these terms occur:

1. My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you,
2. So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;
3. Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding,
4. If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures;
5. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.
6. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding;

7. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;

8. He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.

9. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

10. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul,

11. Discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you.

Spiritual *Sophia*

In Colossians 1:9, as we have it in our English Bibles, 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."

Knowing God's will involves wisdom in the general sense. That's the meaning of the word he uses here in the original language. It's the word *sophia*, which means broad and general wisdom.

The Greeks and later pagans worshipped a goddess named Sophia - the goddess of wisdom. In the second century the Gnostics would come to teach the ultimate blasphemy, that the goddess Sophia was the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. They would teach blasphemy against the Spirit.

But even a century before this would happen, Paul was making it clear to the Colossian believers that they were to have no part in this pagan idolatry of Sophia, or wisdom, as a goddess. True wisdom, Paul says, comes from God. That's what I'm praying for, for you Colossian believers, he says in verse nine. Don't let anyone cheat

you out of true wisdom, God's wisdom, the Bible's wisdom, by drawing you away into this mixture of pagan philosophy and Christianity, he says later on in chapter two, verses eight and eighteen. Paul is praying that they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom.

The sense of this word *sophia* in the original language has to do with *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. The Bible gives us the general sense of what pleases God and does not please God. The Bible gives us the general understanding of what constitutes sound doctrine, and what constitutes heresy. The Bible gives us the general understanding of what is right and proper in the life and worship of the church, and what is not. Paul is going to talk about those things in some detail in 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, how a Christian is to conduct himself in the home, how the Christian is to conduct himself in the workplace, how the Christian is to conduct himself in relation to other believers. Paul is going to talk about all of these things in more detail in chapters three and four.

At Least Ninety Percent of the Answers

Dear Christian friend, if you understand the general principles of God's Word, if you read it and study it so that the Bible's way of thinking becomes your way of thinking - you'll probably have at least ninety percent of the answers to your questions about what the will of God is for your life. Am I making a decision, am I following a path, that conforms to the general principles for Christian life, thinking, and conduct that are laid down in the pages of Scripture? Asking and answering those kinds of

questions based on the authority of the Word of God is what the Apostle Paul calls here spiritual wisdom. The overwhelming majority of the decisions we need to make as Christians are clearly governed by this kind of wisdom – an understanding of the general principles that are to be found throughout the Word of God, expressed consistently and without any deviation or contradiction.

But in this verse, Paul also speaks of "spiritual understanding." This is a significantly different term that reveals an additional aspect of how Christians are to know the will of God. We'll take that up in our next study.

Next: [What is Spiritual Understanding?](#)

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