

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: July 11, 2010

Learning To Discern God's Leading

by Dan Trygg

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

John 14:26

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so 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."

I Cor. 2:12,13

Anyone who has come to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and has been spiritually reborn, has received the Spirit of God (Gal. 4:6). This is God's promise to all who repent and believe the gospel message (Acts 2:38,39; Gal. 3:14). He has come to teach and guide us, to reveal to us what God has made available to us in Jesus, and to lead and empower us to live lives that bring God glory (Jn. 14:26; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8). In fact, as you read the NT, it is quite apparent that **God's plan is that we live by the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, and are to be led by the Spirit** (Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18). It is the fruit of the Spirit's presence in our lives that can change our character (Gal. 5:22,23). **It is through Him that we can put old habits and behaviors to death** (Rom. 8:12), **and it is the Spirit who gives us life and the ability to walk in righteousness as God's servants** (Jn. 6:63; II Cor. 3:6). **He actually manifests the life of Jesus through our otherwise weak and incapable human bodies** (II Cor. 4:11). It is His working within us that fills us with righteousness, joy, peace and hope (Rom. 14:17; 15:13). Instead of living by the law, trying to do right by our own efforts and our own understanding, **we can learn to respond to the working of the Spirit inside of us to lead us in the freedom of His transforming life** (II Cor. 3:5,6,17,18; Rom. 8:1-4). He empowers us in special ways to serve one another (I Cor. 12:4-7; Heb. 2:4). Just as Jesus Himself was empowered by the Spirit to do good, to heal and to cast out demons, in the same way the Spirit can enable us to do the same (Acts 10:30). He will give us what to speak, when we are called to testify about Jesus (Matt. 12:18; Lk. 12:12,13), as well as boldness to proclaim it (Acts 4:31).

Since the activity of the Holy Spirit is to be so much at the center of our lives, it seems obvious that we would need to be able to recognize His leading and working in us. A cursory reading of the NT reveals that God's people were often directed by the Spirit. He spoke to them directly (Acts 8:29; 10:19,20; 13:2), as well as through prophetic messages given to others for them (Lk. 2:26; Acts 11:28; 20:23; 21:11). Interaction with the Spirit was a common enough experience that the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" was spoken of as a common hope or expectation, not just reserved for special people at unusual times (II Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). At times He directed them by hindering or blocking their movements or efforts (Acts 16:6,7). At other times, He would direct by dreams or visions (Acts 2:17; 11:5-12; 16:9,10). How do we learn to recognize what He is doing?

It is important to recognize that, just like so many other things in life, it is possible to be deceived or in error in this area. We can misperceive what is the "voice" of the Holy Spirit, confusing it with our own thoughts, or even the attempts of the enemy to influence us. Many people have been misled by deceiving spirits. The Bible warns us that this will become a significant problem toward the conclusion of the age, the times you and I live in now. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons..." (I Tim. 4:1). The Scriptures are full of warnings against being deceived or led astray (Eph. 5:6; II Thess. 2:3; Matt. 24:11,24; Col. 2:4; II Pet. 2:1-3; 3:17; Jude 1:3-20). Most of this deception will come to us through other people. Many of them, however, have fallen prey to deceiving spirits. Aside from these sources, we also are quite capable of deluding *ourselves*! **This is not an infrequent phase that many go through as they seek to discern the voice of the Spirit. They are so eager and watchful for Him that they begin to latch hold of their own thoughts or feelings, as if they were the voice of the Lord.** Over time, hopefully, they will begin to recognize their over-exuberance, and learn to be more cautious and skillful in discerning what is of God, and what is not.

How do we begin to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit?

The first thing is to begin to be mindful that God *desires* to communicate with you, and lead you into His will. If you believe that, then you will **apply yourself to become attentive to Him, His will and His ways.** Paul puts it this way, "those who are according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). One of the most fundamental principles of relationship with God is that **He will honor those who honor Him.** If you want God to speak to you, then you will indicate that by learning to quiet yourself to hear Him, and will be especially mindful to be obedient in those areas God has already revealed Himself. Think of the counsel of Eli to Samuel when God was calling

him in the night. Samuel did not yet know the voice of the Lord. When Eli realized that God was waking Samuel up, calling him by name, he instructed the boy, "...if He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening'" (I Sam. 3:10). So, **be mindful and watch, and if you believe that God is revealing something, be all the more attentive.**

Secondly, be asking God for His guidance. When Jesus announced that the Holy Spirit would be coming, He referred to Him as "the Helper". This word in Greek literally means, "one-called-alongside-to-help". It implies that the Helper expects to be invited. He does not barge in where He is not wanted. If we think we have things figured out on our own, we may miss out on God's best simply because we don't *ask* for His help. "Does anyone lack wisdom? Let him ask of God, who gives to all people liberally, and without chiding, and it will be given to him" (Jas. 1:5).

Third, study the Scriptures. Part of what Jesus said the Spirit would do was to "bring to your remembrance what I said". God purposefully inspired the writings of the collection of books we have in the Bible as a special revelation of His will, His purposes and His ways. His Word has been tested, and proven true (Psa. 18:30). Furthermore, Jesus said that if we abide in His words, we will come to know the truth, and the truth would set us free (Jn. 8:31,32). The writer to the Hebrews indicates that those who are accustomed to the Word, and put it into practice in their lives, will have their abilities trained and strengthened to discern good and evil (5:13,14). The precious and magnificent promises contained within the Scriptures are given so that we might become sharers of the divine nature, and escape worldly corruption (II Pet. 1:4). These writings are helpful to instruct us, challenge us, correct us and train us in righteousness so that we might be spiritually proficient, fully equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16,17). God delights to exalt His Word, even more than His own name (Psa. 138:2). Our investments there will not be wasted.

Fourth, include other spiritually-minded people in the discerning process. We are so used to thinking of our *own* spiritual journey. We forget that **we are part of a larger Body, the Body of Christ. We each have different gifts, with different kinds of perception, ability and discernment.** We also have a wealth of insight and wisdom due to the fact that we all have unique personal histories, personalities, temperaments and life experiences. We all see in part. **Often, as we share our experiences, God will give additional insight to someone *else* who will then be able to help us grasp the counsel of the Spirit for us as an individual, or as a community.** Our Western individualistic mindset often balks against this, but it is the way God chooses to work. I Cor. 2:12 says that we have received the Spirit so that we might know the things God has freely made available to us. We come to understand these as "spiritual-ones judge-together spiritual-things". This last phrase is translated differently in various translations, but I think this is closest to the actual language of the Greek. Unfortunately, because of our individualistic mindset, translators have not grasped what Paul was trying to say. As spiritual people put their heads and hearts together, they will be able to more effectively discern the things of the Spirit. **This principle of taking counsel together does not mean that we are *necessarily* to go along with what others think.** We see Paul on several occasions taking a stand in opposition to the mind of others. In the first scenario (Gal. 2:11-21), he opposed Peter, Barnabus, and almost all the other Jewish believers in the church, because they were compromising an important truth of the gospel, in regards to their relationship to the Law as Jewish Christians. He and Barnabus split over the issue of whether Mark ought to return to the work with them (Acts 15:36f.). In that case, the difference of opinion was of the Lord, and two separate teams resulted. Later, Paul was given a personal word by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22), but people along the way kept prophesying that he would be imprisoned there (Acts 20:23; 21:4,10-14). They concluded that he should not go, but he was given different instructions. The same will happen to us. **There *will be* times when others will not understand, and we will be compelled by what we perceive to be clear instructions or Biblical principles. We must follow the revealed Word and our conscience in such matters.** The *interactive process* is healthy, however, and even contrary opinion is a safeguard, because it will drive us to examine our opinions more carefully.

Finally, test-out-by-experimentation-to-discover the will of God. Remember, that this is an experiential learning process. It is an art. If we are teachable, we will learn to discern more effectively. The Greek word here means that **we can learn to be more precise through lessons learned through our failures or short-comings.** God does not expect us to get it right all of the time. In fact, He knows that we *won't*, ...we *can't*. Some things are best learned through trial and error. **It is important here to avoid too much "God talk".** When we say, "God told me", we had better be very sure it was Him. By saying, "God told me", we force ourselves into the dilemma where we make God responsible for our mistakes. This can make us very defensive and unable to evaluate our perceptions with an open mind. How can we learn to sharpen our skills if we cannot allow ourselves to miss it, sometimes? How can others offer helpful insights, if they must challenge "the word of the Lord"? **It is more helpful to talk in terms of "I believe" or "I think", because then, if we are wrong, we can more easily admit it, and make adjustments.**