

“Spiritual Discernment”
Ephesians 5:10
(Preached at Trinity, July 5, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapters 1-3** we read of the treasures of God's electing grace.
 - A. He chose us from the foundation of the world.
Ephesians 1:5-6 NAU - "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."
 - B. He demonstrated His rich mercy in raising us up from spiritual death to life.
Ephesians 2:4-6 NAU - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus"
2. Since the beginning of **Chapter 4** Paul has been pressing upon his readers the reality of God's transforming grace. If this is true of you then live it. He has expressed it in many ways.
Ephesians 4:17 NAU - "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind"
Ephesians 4:22-24 NAU - "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."
3. Last time we saw it in terms of darkness and light
Ephesians 5:8 NAU - "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light"
 - A. All of us should ask ourselves, does my life demonstrate a life called from out of darkness into light. It will demonstrate itself clearly. Does your life show evidence of God's transforming grace? Are you bearing the fruit of light?
 - B. It will be evidenced by your love for the brethren
1 John 2:9-11 NAU - "The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

- C. It is evidenced by your holiness
Ephesians 4:24 NAU - "put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."
1 Peter 2:9 NAS - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"
4. There is another important characteristic of walking in the light. The Christian is engaged in the pursuit of pleasing Christ.
Ephesians 5:10 NAU - "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
A. Paul isn't talking about some sort of works righteousness whereby we are seeking ways to make ourselves acceptable to Christ. There are those who are lawless by nature and yet they fear God's condemnation. They hate the Law of God and yet they fear to disobey.
Romans 8:7-8 NAU - "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
B. Paul has his sights on evangelical obedience—Gospel obedience based upon a love for Christ. Paul is speaking about the desires of the regenerate heart. The Christian wants to please Christ.
5. Paul has been contrasting darkness and light. If darkness describes spiritual blindness light describes spiritual insight. It describes the sanctified mind.
A. The spiritually minded man seeks after holiness
B. Paul's focus here is upon honoring Christ in obedience to His Law – the Christian delights in the Law of God.
6. The lost man cannot and will not seek to please God. He is incapable of pleasing God.
Hebrews 11:6 NAU - "And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."
A. There is nothing that he does that pleases God. His best works are displeasing to God.
B. 1689 LBC – “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God,”
7. The lost man dwells in darkness – God is light. The lost man is defiled. God is holy. He is enslaved to sin under the power of sin. His will is corrupt, his mind is corrupt. The lost man is characterized by lawlessness – though he doesn't believe he is.
Ephesians 4:18 NAU - "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart"
8. The “ignorance” of the darkened understanding of the lost man is being progressively removed and sanctified in the believer.
A. Paul says here, - "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
The word is - δοκιμάζω – It means to “test, analyze, examine”
It means to put under careful examination and scrutiny. Word used in 2 Cor 13:5

2 Corinthians 13:5 NAU - "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?"

- B. Of deacons we read:
1 Timothy 3:10 NAU - " These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach."
- C. This is at the heart of the Christian life – we are carefully examining every detail to determine if it is pleasing to Christ.

I. What is the means for testing and knowing what is pleasing to Christ?

- A. First of all, it demands the transforming grace of God
1. Paul carefully states this important truth. We were "formerly darkness" but this has changed – "but now. . ."
Ephesians 5:8 NAU - "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord"
 2. In our former condition we were ignorant to what is pleasing to Christ
Ephesians 4:18 NAU - "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart"
 - a. The lost man can acquire great storehouses of earthly knowledge but regarding the things of God they are completely ignorant.
1 Corinthians 2:14 NAU - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."
 - b. He fails to see morality as involving absolutes. Even some Christians fail to see how all encompassing it is.
 3. Regeneration begins the process of renewal
Ephesians 4:22-23 NAU - " that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind"
Colossians 3:9-10 NAU - "since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"
- B. It is a work of the Holy Spirit but the means the Holy Spirit uses is the Word of God.
1. God uses His Word to grow us to maturity and grant us discernment regarding His will.
NAS **Hebrews 5:13** – "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."
 2. In order to discern the will of God and apply it rightly in all the thousands of complex situations in life we must have spiritual discernment. This comes through the progressive renewal of the mind through God's Word.

Romans 12:2 NAU - " And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

3. This is at the heart of being able to discern what is pleasing to Christ. It demands a spiritual mind.

It demands having our minds transformed by God's Word.

It demands a mind that rises above this present age

Colossians 3:2 NAU - "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

II. What is the result of this discernment?

- A. Paul is saying here that this discernment involves being able to discern what is pleasing to Christ.

Ephesians 5:10 NAU - "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."

1. Paul uses the same word in Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2 NAU - "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

2. This discernment gives us the ability to reason properly concerning the ways of God

It enables us to think properly – to think the thoughts of God

It is spiritual understanding. It is spiritual wisdom.

Paul continues this line of thought:

Ephesians 5:15 NAU - "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise"

Ephesians 5:17 NAU - "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

3. Paul speaks of having the mind of Christ

1 Corinthians 2:16 NAS - "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."

4. Such a mind changes everything. It affects our decisions. It controls how we talk, what we say.

1 Corinthians 2:13 NAU - " which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*."

- B. It enables us to walk as children of light

Ephesians 5:8-10 NAU - "walk as children of Light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."

1. **Verse 9** is a parenthesis – Paul is saying that the Divine illumination produces goodness, righteousness, and truth

2. It enables us to be spiritually minded—to have our minds enlightened to spiritual things—to the things of the Spirit
Romans 8:5 NAU - "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."
3. It enables us to rightly discern what to allow into our lives
 - a. Christian liberty is a wonderful grace. But far too often Christians lacking discernment allow all manner of things that are of little spiritual benefit to them
 - b. Spiritual discernment informs our Christian liberty
Galatians 5:17 NAU - "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." (what you want)
 Two ways to understand this:
 The flesh keeps us from doing the things we desire in the Spirit
 The Spirit keeps us from doing the things we desire in the flesh
4. The things pleasing to Christ describes our desire for our lives to positively glorify Him. Our lives are far more than simply excluding certain things. What are the things that reflect His glory?
 This means at times we willingly give up our liberty. This is at the heart of **Verse 10** - "Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
 - a. What things reflect His Lordship over me?
1 Corinthians 6:12 NAU - "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."
 - b. And what things reflect our love for others? Are we willing to give up our rights for them?
1 Corinthians 10:23-24 NAU - "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor."

Conclusion:

1. If rightly understanding what is pleasing to Christ is only possible through His Word will we not spend many hours feeding upon it?
1 Peter 2:2 NAU - " like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"
2. And then we pass from the milk of infancy to the meat of maturity
Hebrews 5:13-6:1 NAU - "For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."