***Christian Giving  
  
Colossians 1:3-8  
  
COL-074***

We are studying Colossians 1:9-14. Our subject is "Prayer for the Colossians," segment number eight.

As we have pointed out, the human race is filled with people who don't operate very well in their daily lives for a variety of reasons. Some people are obviously out of kilter. Others, who are more sophisticated, are not so easily spotted as out of function. Society has a way of referring to these people, because we're all aware that they do exist. People refer to them in a variety of ways. They say that some people do not have their lights on, so they muddle through life. Or we describe a person as having only one oar in the water. So, he goes in circles, and he gets nowhere. Or we refer to him as half-baked. So, he never gets to completion in anything. He is simply dysfunctional.

So, these people do not operate effectively in coping with life. They cannot meet the issues of dealing with people, with circumstances, and with things. This is always a sad thing to see in anybody, but it is enormously sad to see it in a Christian, because if there's one thing a Christian should not be, it's dysfunctional in life. If there's one thing a Christian has divinely provided for him, it is the means to be a properly functioning human being that moves rapidly toward his ultimate destiny to be in the image of Jesus Christ. If there's one thing about the Lord Jesus, it was that He was not dysfunctional in His humanity in any way. And what He is what we are to become. God simply did not create man to be dysfunctional, but to reflect the image of God in terms of qualified, effective, competent living.

However, the sin nature in man; the world's structure of evil; and, Satan himself will all conspire to make a person dysfunctional, and we are, therefore, bombarded with all kinds of wrong guidance and wrong information that makes us operate in the wrong way. The Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity had to learn Himself how to function in life, so that He would not be dysfunctional, and that He would not fall victim, then, to Satan. For that, God the Father provided Him with a divine power system. That same power system is provided by God the Father for us today, so that we can operate and function effectively as a human being. That is available to every believer today. And that is what Paul is talking about in Colossians 1:9-10. He is laying out how to be a functional human being.

The first step of that, we have already covered – that he needs to be filled with something. There is a great void within a human being that causes him to be dysfunctional. And until that void is filled with that missing element, which no human being has, even at the point of his new birth. But at the point of his new birth, it now becomes possible for him to possess this. And until he has that void filled with that missing element, he will be dysfunctional. And in time, we will get further in looking at that second factor – what it is that he needs to be filled with.

It is the job, however, I want to remind you, of the pastor-teacher in the local church congregation, to guide believers into the divine power system for normalcy in life. This is his responsibility before God. He has the ability to do it. He has the information. And this is a good and responsible thing for him to do. However, I caution you that this is highly resented. I can tell you for sure that there have been people who have been blowing their fuses the last three weeks, young and old alike, at some point in what they have heard. They do not like to be faced with being dysfunctional. Some of them have made it a point not to be here today, probably, because they do not want to be irritated by the awareness of their own dysfunctionality. But if you think you're smarter on this thing than the Word of God, and what has been laid out for you, just blow the pastor-teacher off. After all, someday, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, he's going to stand there, and you're going to stand there, and we're going to find out who was right and who was wrong. And then the issue will be settled. In the meantime, the consequences may be very significant for you. It is his job to make you aware of what is out-of-keeping with the Christian life as God has designed it to be.

The virtues of a functional person are the goal of a believer for effective living. The fundamental virtue of a functional person, we have seen, is that God the Holy Spirit rests upon him. We draw this from the Isaiah 11:2 passage, which lists for us the seven basic features of a functional human being. These were laid out there, as the predictive Word of God, to describe the humanity of the future coming Messiah Savior Jesus Christ. And from that, we pick up our cues and guidelines for our own qualities that should be in us.

The first thing that Isaiah 11:2 points out is that, upon the humanity of Christ, there would rest the Spirit of God. That means, for us, that we are born-again; we are saved; we are spiritually alive; and, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This, of course, is not true of unbelievers. They're not going to heaven. They're not spiritually alive. They're spiritually dead. And they are not indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God does not rest upon an unbeliever. And an unbeliever is a very tricky factor. Many people who think they're in with God are totally out with God. And it only takes a subtle little bit of interjecting a works system in order to keep you from heaven.

Some of you agree, when some of your relatives die, that you should be grieving for them now if you know that they think that salvation is a matter of the fact that Christ has died for them and they believe it, but their good life keeps them in. The very fact that they offer their good life neutralizes, the Word of God says, the grace basis on which God may give eternal life. So, Romans 11:6 says, "If it's by works, it's not grace. And if it's grace, it's not works." You can't mix the two.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "God saves on the basis of grace:" "I'll give you a gift, but if you insist on paying me for it, then that's it. I cannot give you salvation. So, this issue is very confused.

I had a man at the house yesterday doing a little repair job. He wanted to know what kind of a church we were. And we found that he used to go to church, but he didn't go to church anymore. He was discouraged by what he heard. And he was discouraged on the pressures, and the issue of salvation somehow was touched upon. And I said, "Well, let me give you something that you might be interested in reading. I wrote it." And I gave him one of our Berean evangelism brochures. And I said, "I understand your problem with churches, but the first step of dealing with these issues is knowing that you're right with God. This little booklet will make it clear. You'll have no question about it, and it's not somebody's opinion – it's the Word of God." When he was about to leave, he picked up his booklet, and his partner looked at the booklet, and he looked more closely. He said, "Oh, what is that?" And I said, "Would you like one? It's a little book I wrote about how to go to heaven." He said, "Well, I'm a preacher's son. Right away I knew he was in trouble. So I said, "Well, let me get you one. And I picked up another one and gave it to him. So, here are two people you can pray for. I don't know what their status is. Maybe they're both saved. But at least if they read the book they're going to be very confident that they're saved. They're going to have it all very clear, and they're not going to undermine what God has done.

So, this issue of being a born-again person is where it all starts. You can't be a normal human being if you're not born-again spiritually. And most people who are religious are not born-again. They're not going to heaven. They're not the children of God. They are only the children of Satan with religious garments on them.

So, the first virtue of a normal person is to be indwelt by God the Holy Spirit as a result of having been baptized into Jesus Christ at the point of salvation, through their faith in Him for the covering of sin – the payment of sin which He gave them.

Now on the foundation of the Holy Spirit, we have seen in the passage in Isaiah, three pairs of virtues that constitute a normal functioning human being. The first pair of virtues deals with the intellectual virtues. There is, first, the spirit of wisdom. This is the ability to apply properly known Bible doctrine from one's human spirit to a life situation. Now, I must remind you that this is something you ask God for. I wanted to be sure that that didn't slip by us the last couple of Sundays. When we talk about wisdom, we're talking about how to take the doctrine you know and apply it, and that's no easy thing. You know a lot of doctrine, and if you don't apply it to a situation, it doesn't do you any good. Oh, it's residing in your human spirit. You've received it. You're positive toward it. You're not negative. But applying it ought to be a prayer all day long.

I've come to a new appreciation, just from this study, of how important it is to say, God give me wisdom to apply the appropriate Word of God to this situation. That's along with the other intellectual factor here, which is understanding. But wisdom, the applying of the Word of God, is so important.

**Tithing**

Let me give you an example. I was in a place of business the other day, and there were a couple of other people waiting to be dealt with. And the proprietor knows me, and who I am. So, we got off on discussing something about the Bible and spiritual things. And pretty soon, these other people, who were waiting to be taken care of, got interested, and they're listening in, and they're asking questions. And this man that owned the business said, "Well, my father had a terrible situation with churches – the church that he went to." He said that it happened to be a Pentecostal church. And he said it was over the matter of church offerings. And what he told me then brought to mind this very thing we're talking about – wisdom.

There is a doctrine in the Word of God concerning supporting God's work financially. And there are all kinds of situations come up in life on how to do that, and the problems with doing that. So, to apply the biblical doctrine of grace-age offerings to the situation that you have in life is a point of wisdom. And I could tell that this poor man, this man's father, did not have wisdom.

His father had been told that he was obliged to give God 10% of all of his income. And the father did not want to do that. He resented, furthermore, the pressures that were put upon the people of that congregation by that church with this principle – that every member is going to be a tither. You will give 10% of your income to God's work.

In fact, he said it finally came to the climax where the pastor confronted his father one Sunday, and he said that if he did not bring his tithe, he would come after him and get it. Now, I don't think I'd like to be in the tithe collecting business during the week. That's pretty tricky. That's getting very close to being one of the tax collectors, and they're not too popular. But to be a tithe collector during the week – that can't be a very nice job. But this preacher apparently had some convictions on this subject. Well, the father simply stopped attending the church in response.

Now the preacher's intention, I recognize, was to help this man realize that there was a responsibility in financing God's work. And the problem was that he did not apply the right doctrinal principle. The preacher did not have wisdom. He lacked the wisdom to apply the knowledge of doctrine that applied to this situation, because tithing doesn't belong to the Christian era. It is part of the theocracy of the Jews under Judaism in the Old Testament. It belongs to Israel. And it was, of course, a religious income tax. It was not something that you gave if you were rich, and not if you were poor. There was no various rates as to when you give. If you were poor as a hound dog, you gave 10%. If you were rich as Midas, you gave 10%.

Christians now may choose to tithe, but it's not obligatory as it was under Old Testament Judaism. Now, that's the application of doctrine. And that's what that minister should have done for that poor man. Instead, he was leading the whole congregation awry. Now, this is not unusual. You have an enormously large church in Dallas. It's a ridiculously enormous church. It has so many members they could never all gather in church at the same time, because they don't intend for people to come to church. They really don't need to. They're not going to miss anything. But once a year, that famous pastor gets up there, and he gives his annual sermon on tithing. And all the people glow with how wonderful that sermon is, especially the guys who have to pay the bills. And they don't realize that here's a great and famous preacher, whom all of you know, who does not have the wisdom to apply what the Bible says about Christian giving and supporting the work of the Lord.

**Church-Age Giving**

The New Testament has a totally different doctrine for Christian giving to support God's work. Christian giving is governed by the doctrine of grace, so that the amount that you give is a freewill choice. I'm now going to use my Bible to read you some Scriptures on this subject that I think would help illustrate this principle of wisdom. Suppose that I asked you, "Where in the New Testament can I find how to give as a Christian?" You should be able to snap back: "2 Corinthians 8-9. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says this: "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart (the way you've thought through this thing), not grudgingly or under compulsion (it's a grace operation), for God loves a cheerful giver."

So, giving in the church era is entirely what you, by choice, before God, decide to give. It is a free will choice. The amount is determined by the governing and guiding of the Holy Spirit. The sacrifice of substance is an established responsibility of the Christian. How much that substance is, at any point in time in your life, is the governing direction of the Spirit of God. Christian giving, furthermore, is a sacrifice which is to be given in regularity. That is very specifically pointed out in 1 Corinthians 16:2, where it says, "On the first day of every week (Sunday), let each one of you put aside, and save as he may prosper, that no collection be made when I come." Paul is talking about the collection for the famine – to relieve the famine of the saints in Jerusalem. He says, "When I get there, I don't want to be collecting this offering. Get it done the way offerings are supposed to be done, by taking it up every Sunday, as you have set aside during the week what goes to God." And I think you should notice that it is set aside – what the Spirit of God now directs you should go to God. The "set aside" is never excused. So, Christian giving is a weekly basis operation, and to be grace oriented is the way to do it.

This man in the discussion at the place of business – somehow I mentioned that we at Berean Church actually don't even pass an offering place. He said, "Well, how do you get the money?" I said, "We have a box at the door so that people without intimidation can freely walk up." And I sit up at the front here, as people are walking in, and the routine is very obvious to me. People walk in the door; they hit the offering box, first thing; and, then they come in. They trust me that what they're going to get from me is going to be worth paying for. They pay ahead of time. And these people know that they have set aside at home, and they come prepared, and nobody has to pressurize them. I remind them of the need – maybe specific needs, but it's up to them.

Now, the point of all this (applying doctrine to this situation) is that there is never a time when the believer is not to bring an offering. That's the bottom line. It's always telling you how to bring it, and when to bring it, and the circumstances for bringing it. There is never an exception. There is never a time when you walk in, and the week has ended, or whatever your pattern of giving is, that the offering is not to be there. 2 Corinthians 8:12: "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have." You have the readiness to give, then God says that you give from what you have, not from what you don't have. But the point is that here is a spiritual sacrifice. It's called a sacrifice of substance in Scripture. It is to be done regularly on the first day of the week.

This is further illustrated that, after the poor widow in the experience of Jesus when he was watching the rich men give their money at the temple treasury, and this widow walked up, she gave her tithe and then she wanted to make an offering. And she proceeded then to do just that. You would've thought that if there was a time when somebody should not give an offering, this is it, because she was down to her last few cents. Luke 21:1-4: "And Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins, and He said, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them. For they all, out of their surplus, put into the offering, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.'" She gave out of her poverty? "I have come upon hard times; therefore. I cannot give to God's work?" Not true. When you apply doctrine to the situation, it is not true. There's never a time when the sacrifice of substance can be blown off. Sacrifices are to be done regularly to God as they were in the Old Testament; so are the spiritual sacrifices in the New Testament. The principle is still the same.

We have another example. The great Macedonian Christians are the focus of 2 Corinthians 8:9. They gave out of their poverty for the Jerusalem famine fund. Notice 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, where Paul says, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia." This is the grace of giving that he's talking about: "That in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." Out of their deep poverty? And the Greek says: "Their downright deep poverty." These people were broken. They were busted, because they had come upon terrible hard times as well. And yet, out of the ordeal of the affliction, not only the persecution of the Roman Empire, but out of the poverty that they were going through financially, there was a great joy that overflowed, so that they were extremely rich in their joy with God, because of their liberality of what they gave to the Jerusalem famine fund.

Luke 21:3-4, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord." Now, that is something – according to their ability, and then they scraped something more? Maybe they did a little borrowing from friends, and said, "I want to do this now, while Paul is here. To get the money, I'll repay you next week or so." They went down to the bottom. These people were not saying, I've got to save for the future, or things are too hard for now.

Instead, verse 4 says, "Begging with us, with much entreating, for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. And this not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." And there's the secret. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. What did they give? They gave their souls. They gave themselves. Why? Because they were functional human beings. A functional Christian belongs to God. And once you give yourself to God, then that's it. You're a slave whether you starve or not, and whether you are down or not. That's irrelevant. You do the right thing with the means that you have to make the sacrifices that you are always obliged to make to God.

They said: "This not as we had expected." We didn't expect these people to be that gracious in their giving, and to go even beyond what they were able to do. But they gave. They did this because they'd already given themselves to God. So, there was nothing that they were inclined to withhold from Him.

Notice 2 Corinthians 8:6-7, "Consequently, we urged Titus, that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all the earnestness, and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. What gracious work? The sacrifice of substance. Paul says, "You people abound in everything. You have a great faith. You have a great word for God. You have a great knowledge of doctrine. And you have a devoted earnestness. You have a great mental attitude love for Christ that has been inspired in you by the Word of God. Now I want you to abound in this gracious work of giving."

Now, what kind of a statement is that to make to people who are broke? These people, in their poverty, Paul says, "I want you to keep it up." I'll show you in a minute why. A Christian indeed may obligate himself financially to man one way or another, but that never removes his first financial obligation, which is to God's work. Don't ever make that mistake. Obligations to man, however they come about, carelessness or otherwise (too many credit cards, or whatever) never releases from obligation to God financially. That always comes first. And if want deep trouble in your life, and if you want to have real trouble in River City, just skip the obligation to God, and you'll learn what real trouble is. And Christians who are dysfunctional, I've noticed, are very cheap in their financial giving to God's work. They have an emotional love of money, and they have a very big greed problem. They're not like the widow who gave it all because she was glad to do it, because, after all, she already gave herself. So, she could not withhold anything that she had, because, having given herself, she had given everything she possessed as well.

The sure way to increase your financial problems then is to fail to make the sacrifice of substance. If you want real troubles financially, just don't give what you're supposed to give. Just don't give to the work of God, and you'll learn what real financial losses and real financial problems are. 2 Corinthians 9:7-11: "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you; that always, having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." You got it? You decide to be true to your obligation to giving to God. You are free indeed to give. How much – is up to you. You should get the advisement of the Spirit of God, so that "how much" is right, and "how much" is some decently comparable to the enormous income that may be coming into you. And if you do this, as a cheerful person, without compulsion, and without somebody pounding you or head with the tithe and coming around to collect it, then God is able to make all grace abound to you. And that grace refers to money. He's able to make all money abound to you: "That always, having all sufficiency in everything." If you want to know what real prosperity is, and if you want to know how to really make it big financially, then start giving it to the Lord's work: "And you will have abundance for every good deed."

Now, either this is a lie of the most unmitigated kind, or this is the greatest truth that maybe has hit you between the eyes for a while – that you'll have abundance in every good deed. This is the wisdom of applying doctrine. That's what I'm trying to illustrate here – the wisdom of applying doctrine. My friend at the business – his poor father got stomped upon a preacher who did not have the wisdom to take doctrinal principles on Christian, giving and apply them to the situation of the moment.

Verse 9: "As it is written, 'He scattered abroad. He gave to the poor. His righteousness abides forever.'" God responds and returns to those who are faithful in their giving in the support of His work. The sure way to increase your financial situation is to give to the Lord's work.

2 Corinthians 9:10: "Now He Who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You'll be enriched in everything for all liberality, which, through us, is producing thanksgiving to God." Either 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 are an unmitigated lie, or they're true. It is when you increase your giving that you increase your intake. It is when you are faithful to the principle of giving, with generosity, and without anybody putting you in a compulsion, and trying to shame you or force you into it, because you have applied the wisdom of doctrine, then God says: "God, Who supplies seed to the sower, so that there may be bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sewing, and increase the harvest of your righteousness. He will increase the good deeds. He will increase from the good work you have done with the money you've invested. And you will be enriched in everything for all liberality. You're going to have more than you can imagine to give. He will enrich you so that you can be even more liberal: "Which, through us, is producing thanksgiving to God."

R.G. LeTourneau made huge earth moving machines – monstrous things. They became very useful when World War II came along, and they needed machines like that for quick construction of airfields, and so on. But he was always up the creek as a businessman. Finally, he decided, just because God laid it upon his heart, that he was going to stop this business of operating on sometimes; no times; how times; and where times, and that from now on, whatever came into his business, 10% (Zip!), off the top, goes to God. He chose to do that. He was not trying to imitate the Jew. He said, "That's where I'm starting." And from that day on, 10% went. He had trouble meeting bills troubles, and troubles meeting the operation of the business. But his money went to God first. And then he said that a strange thing began to happen: "All of a sudden, after the first couple of months, I'm beginning to see that things are getting easier to pay the bills. And suddenly," he said, "I'm seeing on my financial reports that I've got more money." So he said, "I kicked it up to 15%. I kept the rest, but 15% went to God. And he said that the business started rolling. "It wasn't very long before I was knocking in 20% to God, and I'm keeping the rest. And I can't keep up with spending it."

Well, after a few years, R.G. LeTourneau, who made multiple millions of dollars, gave 90% to God's work, and kept 10% for himself, and never could spend it. This man demonstrated this principle – that you always make the sacrifice of substance. That always comes first. There's never a time when Scripture says the doctrinal principle of wisdom says you can cut out. But it does say that faithfulness to that principle will multiply to your blessing now.

Now, that was great for LeTourneau. It was nice that he had so much money to live on, but can you imagine what kind of an eternity he found when he walked over to the other side with that 90% giving? The liberality of God not only blessed him here, but it has carried over to his eternity. Christian giving is the result of a spiritually functional soul in the believer. If that spiritually functional soul is not in there, then the believer will act with abnormality.

I felt very sad listening to this man tell about his father. His father needed somebody to say, "Let me give you the wisdom of God. I can give you the doctrine, and I can give you the wisdom of applying it to your situation. Everything will clear up. And if you just do it God's way, you'll find great happiness; great satisfaction; and, great eternal reward. Don't let the devil distract you from the sacrifice of substance. Don't let the devil confuse you. I would like to have told that old man that the best was yet before him, because this is exactly what Satan does. Where do you think Satan is going to hit believers who are genuine, and who are functioning in the local church ministry? Where do you think he's going to hit them to stop a ministry that's exposing him, and giving people the insights of doctrine? It's going to hit you at the money point. And therein is our threat. That's our occupational hazard. And you make your own decision, because this is a grace operation. But here's one place (a great example) of the principle of praying for wisdom on how to apply doctrine. And if you do that, boy, it all falls together. Now I know what to do. Now the principles are very clear.

**Christian Giving**

Here's a little summary on the concept of Christian giving. I got to thinking about this subject, and reviewing it, and in some of our past sermons that we have on this in the basic Bible doctrine series on the grace way of giving. And as I just read the notes, I was very impressed with the sermons. I'm sure I'd be even more impressed if I heard them. But the stuff was just splendid. And I just got to thinking about this poor man here at this business, and his father knocking out of church, and losing everything, because some yo-yo preacher couldn't teach him the wisdom that he needed. Here's some general observations about personal financial stewardship.

1. **A Christian does not Own what he Possesses**

A Christian does not own what he possesses. He is simply acting as God's agent in using God's money as He leads. God is the original and final owner of all. And the Christian must someday account for how he has used what is not his. Luke 12:42 and Luke 16:1-2, make that very clear.

1. **Make More Money**

God's money entrusted to us is to be used in such a way as to make more money. It is to be placed for best interest returns. You are to make money with your money (Matthew 25:27).

1. **Love for God**

Money is to be subordinated in our esteem to our love for God. A crude obsession with the things of the good life is often disguised by a pious image of respectability and pseudo refinement (Matthew 19:16-26).

1. **Finance God's Work on the Earth**

God makes money available to us to finance his work on the earth. The technique for getting from God is to live modestly, and give liberally, because it is His money (Luke 6:38).

1. **Giving vs. Receiving**

There is a much greater return of blessing in giving than in receiving. What we get benefits us for the present in a small way, but what we give blesses a wide circle, and thus magnifies our future rewards in heaven (Acts 20:35).

1. **How Much we Keep**

God reckons the value of our money gifts by comparison with what we keep of all that He has entrusted to us. Not all giving is to be richly rewarded in heaven, because often the keeping hides the giving in God's sight (Mark 12:41-44).

1. **False Giving Expects Something in Return**

False giving expects something in return. Much giving of Christians is merely lending, exchanging, or honor-buying with God. True giving has only another's good in view, and delights to give what cannot be repaid or to those who cannot reciprocate (Luke 6:35).

1. **The Causes of the Lord to which we Give**

Our money is dignified and made sacred by the causes of the Lord to which we give it. Giving to worthy human enterprises should be secondary for the Christian (Matthew 23:19).

1. **Spiritual Wealth in Heaven**

Finally, our money is to be converted into spiritual wealth stored in heaven – the more the better. Souls blessed by our spiritual investments will welcome us, and honor us as we enter heaven (Luke 16:9).

**Wisdom and Understanding**

The first pair of virtues upon those upon whom the Holy Spirit rests, then, is the spirit of wisdom – taking a doctrinal principle, and applying it to a situation in our lives. The second of the intellectual virtues is the spirit of understanding. This is the ability to discern the truth in dealing with people and situations: the significance of what one does; what one sees; and, what one hears. And I appreciate the many kind words that many of you had after the last session, because the understanding principal came home loud and clear. Christians are fools so often because they do not have understanding; and, they do not have discernment. Any clown can take them down. Anybody can out-maneuver them. Any situation can confuse them. Again, I remind you that one of the principles we learned is you have to ask for understanding. You have to ask to be able to see through people; to be able to see through a situation; to be able to see through the eyes of God; and, to therefore evaluate with truth. Understanding – what a precious thing it is.

Understanding (discernment), of course, is essential to knowing God's purpose for one's life. That is the point in Colossians 1:9: "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 full knowledge of His will, and all spiritual wisdom and understanding." You do not get understanding unless it is pursued. This is the key factor, along with wisdom, for intellectual functioning stability. Knowledge of doctrine, which comes from God, through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, is the basis of all understanding. You will not have understanding if you don't know the doctrines of Scripture. People do very foolish things in life. They do destructive things to themselves. Why? Because they don't know the principles of doctrine, so they have no understanding possible.

Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And the knowledge of the Holy one is understanding." How do you get to know God? Through the Word of God.

The greatest wealth a person on earth can have in life is understanding. Colossians 2:2 points that out to us – that the greatest possession in life is understanding: "That their hearts may be encouraged," Paul says, "having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery." What a great verse – true understanding as the result of the knowledge of God. Understanding is essential to be a normal person.

The church-age believer has the Holy Spirit indwelling his body to give him the ability to know the consequences of his choices. Christians who lack spiritual understanding are vulnerable to great spiritual deception by a forceful false religious teacher. That teacher may deliberately want to con you, or he may himself be disoriented, but sincere.

I'm amazed how Christians who were once on track have gotten off-track because they've gotten into somebody that has impressed them – a religious leader that triggers something in them, and because they do not have understanding to see through this guy (to see the deception – the little turns from truth that he is propagating), they get caught up, and they get hurt seriously. It is a great thing to have the qualities of wisdom and understanding come from God upon our request. Asking is critical.

So, the normal, functional people are Christians who are in temporal fellowship with the Holy Spirit. They receive wisdom for applying doctrinal principles for the decisions they must make, and they receive understanding as a consequence, so that they know where their actions are going to take them. They're in touch with reality. That is a terrific combination – to know how to apply doctrine, and to know where you are going to end up by the decisions you make; the associations you keep; and, the places you go.

Any Christian who lacks these two intellectual virtues of wisdom and understanding is dysfunctional. The same people who will resent having their condition of dysfunctionality pointed out by the pastor-teacher are these who are in need of having that pointed out. Carnal Christians have more confidence in the guidance of other people rather than of God. Young people have a great problem by being functional, because they want to listen to people their own age who are out of touch with reality. They want to follow the patterns of the people of their own age because they think that this is what's cool to do. But only the person, like the Lord Jesus Christ, Who refused to go wrong with the kids that he was associated with – I can guarantee you that when Jesus was a teenager, He did not play ball with the teenagers He was associated with. He recognized those teenagers as dysfunctional. And He Himself stood by the wisdom of the Word of God. And, therefore, He had the discernment to see through these people that He was associated with, to see that they were fools, but He was wise.

It's amazing to me how Christians would prefer the human dumbness instead of God's smartness as the guidance for their lives. Consequently, they don't click. They grow up, and they don't click.

I still get a letter occasionally from the Dallas jail, from a kid who used to be in the Berean ministries. And he thought that the dumbness of his associates was better than the smartness of God. So, he was the rebel who played ball with the gang who were his peers. And he finally got himself up with the law, and he's in jail. Now he pleads for me to come to see him. Now he pleas for spiritual help. Now he pleas for what he realizes was what he once knew, which was the truth, and which was what he should have obeyed. The only trouble is that I can't do much about that. And the only trouble is that they have more people who want me to come to visit them in jail than I'm able to do. But the Word of God – that, he had. The opportunity – that, he had.

You can see how dangerous it is, as a young person, as well as an older person, to think that people are better advisors; that people are better guides than God Himself; that because people oppose God, that that makes them right. What do you think people did in Noah's day? They hated God. What do you think was their attitude toward Noah? They laughed at him. They rejected him. What do you think Noah and kids had to do? They had to grow up isolated from the gang around them. You realize, don't you, that when Noah was told of build the ark, he didn't have the sons yet. Those boys grew up in that 120-year period while they were helping him build the ark, and the kids didn't have anybody to play with. Kids didn't have anybody to associate with. The neighborhood is filled with all the scum on the face of the earth that had accumulated, and Noah was trying to protect the family and guide them. And they barely were able to find three girls from other families who were oriented enough such that the boys, as they grew up, finally had some wives they could marry who were in the family of God. So, we come down to eight people, and probably Methuselah, the week before the flood – and that's all the saved people on the face of the earth. Methuselah dies' the flood comes; and, humanity begins again.

Who was right? The people clawing on that ark outside who were sophisticated and smart? Oh yeah, they were very clever. They were very rich. They were very competent technologically. But they died in the flood. Simple Noah applied the wisdom of doctrine to the situation, and who had the discernment to see through these people, as impressive as they were – saw that they were losers; and, that going with God was the way to be a winner.

So don't ever be intimidated, kids, by the world's associates. If you associate with that, then you'll be brought down. If you'll associate with cheap religious systems, even if they're biblically based, you'll become cheap. It is a great thing to be a person in depth in the Word of God. But it's a personal decision, and time will identify who are the winners who followed God. May we all be on that team.

Our Father, we thank You for this Your word, and we pray that You will help us to have a great appreciation for the fact that the Word of God is alive and active, and it will do its work for us. But we have to walk moment-by-moment. We are never up there where we have it all together. It's a moment-by-moment correction and realignment, getting back on course. We pray, Father, that You will help us to be true to our navigation systems which are here in Scripture.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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