

GETTING UNDERSTANDING

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Colossians 1:9-10 gives us the goal of being filled with the knowledge of God's will "*in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*" so that we can walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. Ephesians 5:17 teaches us not to be unwise, "*but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" The value of spiritual understanding is described in Proverbs 3:15 as being "*more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.*" Proverbs 3:13 says, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding." Proverbs 4:5 says, "Get wisdom, get understanding," and verse 7 says, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." But to get it, we need to know *where* to go to find it, and also *how* to get there.

The source of understanding

Although man often thinks he can figure everything out for himself and doesn't need God, the Lord lets us know otherwise. As Jeremiah 10:23 says, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*" Job 28:12-13 makes it clear that without God, spiritual understanding will remain elusive to man: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living." Verses 20-21 of the same passage continue with this point: "Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air" Finally, verse 23 reminds us that "*God* understands the way thereof, and *he* knoweth the place thereof." Many scriptures plainly state that God gives understanding (see Psa 119:18,27,34,73,125,144,169; 2 Tim 2:7). Proverbs 2:6 declares, "*For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*" But this gift will only come by diligently studying God's word. We must seek it as for silver and as for hid treasures (Prov 2:4). Psalm 119:103-104 says, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! *Through thy precepts I get understanding:* therefore I hate every false way." Verse 130 says, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple,*" and verse 169 says, "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding *according to thy word.*" In verse 99, the psalmist says, "I have more understanding than all my teachers: *for thy testimonies are my meditation.*" In the New Testament, the Lord also makes the connection between studying and meditating upon his word and gaining understanding of God's will: "*Consider what I say;* and the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (2 Tim 2:7).

Obedience, the fear of the Lord, and understanding

However, it should be noted that hearing by itself is not enough. James 1:22 says, "*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*" If we think that we can attain spiritual understanding merely by learning what God says while neglecting to keep His commandments, then we truly are deceiving ourselves. The connection between obedience to God's commandments and understanding is demonstrated in God's instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy 4:6: "*Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding* in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Psalm 34:11-14 (quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12) teaches that the

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fear of the Lord entails seeing what is good, which requires studying God's word. It also involves translating the seeing of good into the action of departing from evil and doing that good. Proverbs 8:13 similarly states that *the fear of the Lord is to hate evil*. Therefore, obedience is a central component to the fear of the Lord. Numerous scriptures relate the fear of the Lord to understanding. Job 28:28 says, "And unto man he said, *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*" Psalm 111:10 says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.*" A similar statement is also made in Proverbs 9:10: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*" In Psalm 119:100, the psalmist says, "*I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*" For us to understand God's will, we must have the will to do His will, and then do it.

Humility, receiving reproof, and understanding

Obedience is in truth a reflection of humility. In describing the mind of Christ that we must also have in ourselves, Philippians 2:5-8 teaches us about his humility. He left off the form of God and became like us, taking on the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men. He then "*humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*" We too must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet 5:6), and obey Him! Since obedience is a requirement of understanding, and obedience is a demonstration of humility, then humility itself is a requirement of understanding. How? We must show humility by trusting the Lord and acknowledging him, while turning away from our own understanding. Proverbs 3:3-6 says, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." A vital component of understanding is for us to humble ourselves to receive rebukes and correction from God. We have the opportunity to do that every time we study His word. The purpose of a mirror is to rebuke us, to show us what is wrong with ourselves, so we can fix it. James 1:22-25 describes God's word as our spiritual mirror, and we must be humble to hear and do what it shows us. Receiving correction is called the *road of understanding*. Proverbs 9:6-9 says, "Forsake the foolish, and live; and *go in the way of understanding*. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: *rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.*" We see the same point made in Proverbs 15:31-32: "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but *he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.*" Proverbs 19:25 says, "Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and *reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.*" May we all humbly and diligently apply our hearts to understanding, so we truly can be filled with it and walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing!