

Love, Knowledge, and Discernment

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment." Philippians 1:9

The Christian development of "knowledge" was in conflict with both polytheism and Greek thought. As 1 Corinthians 8 teaches, this knowledge is not theoretical. It must go hand in hand with love. "Love" cannot be indiscriminate; it must have the characteristic of knowledge, i.e., what is best for others. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."¹

The word "discernment" deals with moral sense, and has three main references: a.) sensory perception, b.) perception or discernment, and c.) intellectual understanding. While "knowledge" deals with general principles, "discernment" deals with practical applications, the moral dimension that addresses that which is good and evil. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."²

Jeremiah reflects this heart as he sees the storm clouds of war gather: "My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I cannot hold my peace; because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war."³ "Love," combined with "discernment," results in grieving for those living disobedient lives, "knowing" that God will bring certain judgment.

Paul's use of cognitive terms has an ethical application: how a man thinks influences how he behaves. The focus of Paul's concern is knowledge that cultivates love. As he notes in 1 Corinthians 8, knowledge by itself is unless. So too, love can never be mindless.

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:23 ² Hebrews 5:14 ³ Jeremiah 4:19