

Understanding

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding”

Proverbs 3:5

Understanding—The Hebrew word is *bina*. It comes from the preposition *bin* (between) and implies distinguishing *between* good and bad. The Old Testament view of knowledge is different from the way we think of understanding. When we talk about understanding something, we usually mean that we have collected facts or experiences about that thing. “I understand mathematics,” means that I have gathered a body of information about the subject. But the Hebrew view of understanding is different. The Hebrews thought of understanding as superior to simply having information. Understanding is the demonstration of perceptive insight that puts information to work. Understanding is especially important in discerning between good and evil, and for this, a man must rely on the only sure perception, the will of God.

Because disobedience infects a man’s ability to perceive the difference between good and evil, it is fruitless to try to sort out good and evil from our own collection of experiences. Our thinking is defective. We need a sure and certain guide. So, Solomon tells us not to depend on our own understanding but rather to depend on the guidance of God. God’s discernment is never wrong. As long as we stay on the path He has given us, we can’t be mistaken.

We confront this dilemma nearly every day. On all sides people claim that they know what’s right and wrong. But we are instructed to resist the temptation to fall in line with the discernment of men. We know where that leads. When there is no ultimate authority, every man’s opinion becomes the next “truth.” God has not left us in a moral wilderness. He tells us quite clearly what is good and what is evil. That’s why we have to rely on Him. He is not subject to the infection of sin in His thought so what He tells us in the real deal.

Our natural tendency is to opt for a pluralism that allows everyone to claim discernment. We would all like to do whatever we want. But God’s government does not allow this kind of multiple morality. There is a straight and narrow way. It might not be easy to follow, but it is easy to discern. All I have to do is trust what God says.