

Dealing With Difficulty

by Chip Brogden

In 'Dealing With Difficulty', Chip Brogden emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment in recognizing the source of our challenges and responding appropriately through prayer and maturity.

Scripture: Psalm 27:14, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 30:21, Matthew 26:41, Acts 16:6, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Hebrews 5:14, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Spiritual Discernment", "Gods Will"

Description

Chip Brogden discusses the importance of spiritual discernment, emphasizing the need to distinguish between the leading of the Holy Spirit and the hindrances of the enemy. Using examples from Paul's experiences, he highlights the necessity of developing discernment through spiritual maturity and exercise. Brogden stresses the significance of discerning whether obstacles are from God, the devil, or natural circumstances, urging believers to resist the enemy and submit to God's will in various situations. He cautions against presumptuous actions and emphasizes the value of waiting on the Lord for clear direction, rather than relying solely on dreams or visions.

Transcript

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:6-10).

"Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Paul possessed a remarkable sense of spiritual discernment. This is not a gift, such as the gift of discerning of spirits mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. This kind of discernment is a skill that can be developed. Spiritual discernment has to do with spiritual maturity, and it comes only after we have had our senses sufficiently exercised over a period of time and have learned the difference between the hand of the Lord and the work of the enemy (see Hebrews 5:14).

For example, when Paul desired to enter Asia, they said the Spirit prevented him. So they tried to enter another territory, but once again, they said the Spirit would not allow them to do so. Then there was a dream in which a man beckoned to them, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Immediately they went, interpreting this to be the leading of the Spirit. Yet when Paul tried on more than one occasion to go visit the Thessalonians, he said, "Satan (not the Holy Spirit) hindered us." This is most remarkable.

We ought to be able to tell the difference between the Lord preventing us and the devil hindering us. Some Christians throw everything together and treat it as all the same. They reason that if God wants them to be somewhere then He will work everything out in their favor. They think if it is God's will then it will just automatically happen without any trouble at all. Scripture and the experience of countless saints prove otherwise.

We should not expect things to always go as planned, even when we are indeed following the will of God, and especially when we are trying to do what we feel led to do. Sometimes it seems as if everything is rising up against us. Cars break down, people get sick, misunderstandings arise, businesses fail, things happen. We do not want to give the devil any glory and attribute everything to him. But we do want to discern the true operation of the enemy so we may dispose of him. We must exercise discernment and wisdom to know the difference between the hand of the Lord, the work of the enemy, and the natural environment. Otherwise we will suffer unnecessarily.

Once I was preparing to speak and in the days leading up to my engagement it seemed that strange things were happening. A series of problems and tiny aggravations piled up at once. I was to speak on Sunday. Saturday night I found my stomach was suddenly upset and I could not sleep. Then my daughter began having trouble sleeping, and every time I dozed off she would come into the room saying she couldn't sleep. This went on for an hour. Finally I had to get up and go the bathroom again. At this point I was thoroughly irritated.

Suddenly I perceived that there was something beyond the ordinary here. Immediately I whispered, "The Lord rebuke you, satan. You have been discovered. I don't have time for this. Now I'm going back to sleep." My stomach problem vanished and everyone fell asleep immediately. The next day I spoke twice and had no difficulty discharging the burden of the Lord and encouraging the saints. The enemy has never used this tactic with me again because I have overcome him in this area. He is forced to work against me in more subtle ways. He has apparently decided it is easier to stir up the group I am speaking to rather than try to confront me directly. I must say I admire his tenacity. His evil schemes can and do hinder us from time to time, especially when he works against us through other people. Even the apostle Paul was hindered occasionally, and all of us can expect to encounter some opposition whenever we take a position in the Spirit and maintain some kind of testimony and witness for the Lord.

But I shared this to demonstrate that when opposition does come, it is not necessary to get into long conversations with the devil, call the demons out by name, stomp, scream, march in a circle, or get all excited. If it is from the devil then we can resist it, and it will flee. If it does not flee then perhaps it is not from the devil at all. Had I gorged myself with beer and pizza earlier that evening then it would be foolish to think I could rebuke the devil and make my stomach problem magically disappear.

If the source of our trouble is purely satanic, let us send the enemy away and we will not suffer needlessly. If it is purely natural, we ought to patiently pray God's Will to be done in the midst of it. If it is purely human, we just have to bear it patiently or remove ourselves from the situation, for we cannot manipulate the will

of other people. If it is purely reaping what we have sown, we can do nothing but repent and avoid making the same mistakes again in the future. If it is purely of the Lord, we must submit to His dealings with us and realize that we do not see the whole picture, but He sees all things, and He knows what is best.

More than likely our trouble will come from a combination of many things. When we find ourselves in an untoward or contrary circumstance, let us be still and wait before the Lord before jumping to any conclusion or predetermined ideas as to what is happening.

Suppose your car breaks down. We will often interpret this event according to our natural inclination. If we are inclined towards spiritual warfare we may immediately rebuke the devil, thinking he has caused the car to malfunction. Or, we may wonder if this is God's way of telling us we should not make the trip. Or, if we may think there is something worse down the road that the Lord is protecting us from, and we might thank God for causing the car to break down. If we take a more pragmatic view we might just look under the hood and realize that the engine simply overheated. We may add water to the radiator and proceed along as before, never giving it a second thought. But which approach is correct? How do we know the difference between the Spirit preventing, the devil hindering, and the natural course of events? Is it one, both, all three, or none of the above?

Do you see what I mean? With so many options available, how should we pray? The very worst thing we can do is shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, that's life," and just shuffle along. We should not assume anything. We ought to pause and enquire into the meaning behind these circumstances. The easiest thing to do is passively accept whatever happens, thinking this is a sign of faith and great spiritual maturity. No, it is instead a sign of great spiritual laziness. We cannot afford to be apathetic and just accept whatever happens, for many saints suffer needlessly for lack of knowledge. They are unable to discern the times and seasons and circumstance which God has them in. They end up accepting what they ought to resist, and resisting what they ought to accept. They bind where they should loose and they loose where they should bind. They rebuke when they ought to repent, and they repent when they ought to rebuke. This ought not to be so.

We must watch and pray. We must remain sober and alert to what we are experiencing that we may respond appropriately. Perhaps we are experiencing a contrary wind because we are sailing in the wrong direction. We should cultivate an attitude of prayer that says, in effect, "Lord, forgive us if we have sinned against you. If we have violated some natural law, show us what it is and we will set it right. If this is from Your hand we accept it, for You do all things well. We will submit to Your dealings with us. Nevertheless, we steadfastly resist anything and everything pertaining to the enemy." In this way we are not committing ourselves to one particular interpretation of the event. On the one hand we are willing to submit to the dealings of the Lord in our environment, and on the other hand we firmly maintain our ground against the adversary. This sort of prayer closes all the loopholes. It is most pleasing to God, for it is humble towards Him yet firm towards the enemy. Only let us be careful not to pray this before God as some kind of method or incantation. It is a heart-attitude which must to be nurtured.

Never think they you have to know everything there is to know before you can pray. In fact, the less we know, the more we should pray. Those who ask for answers will receive them; those who seek understanding will find it; those who knock on enough doors will eventually find an opening. We should pray without ceasing, and we should watch to see how the circumstances change. Watch and pray; pray and watch. As the circumstances change we will receive light, and our praying will become more effectual, and we will gradually come into line with the Lord's thought. Then we will be clear.

But a word of caution is in order. We should not try to interpret our environment the way a wizard interprets a crystal ball. We should watch, pray, and look to the Lord for direction. We cannot become locked into the same interpretation or method for knowing at all times what we are to do, for the devil may easily counterfeit these things and lead us astray. Although the Spirit of Jesus prevented Paul from entering Asia this time, we see that he was indeed permitted to enter later on, and he eventually preached the Gospel to the entire province, establishing that great body of believers in Ephesus. A "no" from God today could turn into a "yes" from God tomorrow. "Not now" does not mean "never". The seasons, times, and circumstances change, and if we are children of the Spirit then we need to be ready to go wherever and whenever the Wind blows.

The natural tendency is to expect God to always speak to us and lead us in the same way each and every time. This natural tendency must be avoided. For example, Paul had a dream to go to Macedonia, and so he went. Perhaps God will give us a dream, too; then again, He may not give us a dream. If we believe God will lead us through dreams and dreams alone then the adversary will use this to his advantage. On Sunday we will have a dream that says, "Come over to Ephesus and help us." On Monday we will have a dream that says, "Come over to Rome and help us." On Tuesday we will have a dream that says, "Come over to Jerusalem and help us." And so forth. We will run all over the place following voices, dreams, visions, and words. Such is the confusing work of the enemy, and we should not be ignorant of his devices.

If we will wait patiently before the Lord then He will make us to know His will. Almost any mistake can be rectified except presumption and rashness. The flesh is always in a hurry, so we should begin to equate "getting in a hurry" with "getting in the flesh". Out of one thousand presumptuous acts, nine hundred and ninety-nine of them are flesh. We want instant relief, instant answers, and instant results, but God wants us to slow down, remain calm, be still, and know that He is God. He wants us to apprehend His Mind, wait for His Spirit, and become acquainted with His ways. Since we cannot avoid having tribulation in this world, we might as well make the best possible use of every circumstance we find ourselves in. Begin to see all your temptations, tests, and trials as opportunities for growing, maturing, and learning how to live as an Overcomer. Then your problem will become your greatest opportunity for knowing God - for the depth of your revelation is measured by the depth of your suffering.

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