Discernment (144) (aisthēsis from aisthǎnomai = to apprehend by the senses, to perceive and in NT speaks primarily of spiritual perception; our English = aesthetic; the root verb is aio = to perceive) refers to the capacity to understand referring not so much to an intellectual acuteness but to a moral sensitiveness. It thus speaks of moral perception, insight, and the practical application of knowledge—the deep knowledge Paul had already mentioned. Aisthēsis therefore is more of an immediate knowledge than that arrived at by reasoning. It describes the capacity to perceive clearly and hence to understand the real nature of something. It is the capacity to discern and therefore understand what is not readily comprehensible. It refers to a moral action of recognizing distinctions and making a decision about behavior.

It is interesting to note that the meaning of aisthēsis is almost the opposite of the English word “aesthetic” which is derived from the Greek word. Aesthetic speaks of one who is appreciative of, responsive to, or zealous about the beautiful. It has largely to do with personal taste and preference. Paul calls believers to put aside personal tastes and preferences and to focus instead on achieving mature insight and understanding.

The English dictionary states that discernment is the power to see what is not evident to the average mind and stresses accuracy as in reading character or motives. The idea is to detect with the senses and in the present context speaks of a believer’s “spiritual senses” being “fine tuned” (not judgmental but also not gullible - instead discriminating, able to see the difference between two or more things).

Love that abounds in all discernment is love that is controlled by theology, and theology must be applied to life with insight. It is used of those moral and spiritual concepts and actions which involve delicate and keen distinctions, those that require a deep and keen discernment to recognize. Not the ordinary, everyday, easily understood spiritual obligations, but the finer points of Christian conduct. It speaks of those things that are superior, vital, that surpass, that excel! Finally, it refers to the ability to make proper moral and spiritual decisions in the midst of a vast array of differing and difficult choices.

Berean Bible Church...

In 1Corinthians 13:2, we see that knowledge without love equals zero. In Philippians 1:9, we see that love without knowledge equals sentimentalism. As you learn the word and grow in the word it will effect your love.

First epignosis than aisthēsis. People who don't know doctrine have no discernment. It has to do with practical application of that deep knowledge. So, your love is controlled by your theology, and your insight in the application of that theology.

Years ago a man came to our church looking for a place to stay. I told him that we supported the Union Mission and that I would be glad to take him down to the mission. He responded by telling me that he couldn't stay at the mission because he needed a private room. I told him that I would take him to the mission but that was the best I could do. He said to me, “I thought that Christians were supposed to love?” I said, “We are, but we're not supposed to be suckers.” That is a paraphrase for discernment. This made him angry and he got violent. We ended up calling the police and he was taken to jail. We need to be discerning. Feeding and putting up a person who is too lazy to work does not help them. Do you know what God's cure for slothfulness is? Hunger! (How to Glorify God, Philippians 1:9-11)

John Eadie writes that aisthēsis...

means power of perception. Physically, it denotes perception by the senses, especially that of touch; and in the plural, it signifies the organs of such perception—the senses themselves. The transition to a spiritual meaning such as that of apprehension is obvious. It might be rendered ethical tact, that faculty of moral discernment which is quick and unerring in its judgment, and by a peculiar insight arrives easily and surely at its conclusions.

Joseph Beet says the idea of aisthēsis is...

Perception of qualities. Frequent in classical Greek for perception by the bodily senses. Paul desires for his readers a comprehensive acquaintance with things divine and a faculty of distinguishing right from wrong in the various details of life. The word all recalls the number and variety of these details. (Philippians 1:9-11
Commentary

Marvin Vincent

Used of the senses, as Xenophon: ἀισθήσεως perception of things sweet or pungentâ€¢. Of hearing: ἀκοὴ is possible to go so far away as not to afford a hearingâ€¢. The senses are called aisthêseis. Plato uses it of visions of the gods. Compare aisthētrion - senses, Heb. 5:14-note. Discernment selects, classifies, and applies what is furnished by knowledge.

MacArthur writes that aisthesis refers to a high level of biblical, theological, moral, and spiritual perception. It also implies the right application of that knowledge. In other words, discernment is the understanding and appreciation of the real knowledge of Godâ€™s revelation that produces holy living. Unlike the way that worldly love is often characterized, biblical love is far from blind. On the contrary, it is wise and judicious. (MacArthur, J. Philippians. Chicago: Moody Press)

Barclay writes that aisthesis is 'sensitive perception'. It is the quality of heart and mind which is sensitive to that which is wrong. It is the experience of life that the first time a man commits a wrong action he does so with a kind of shuddering reluctance; if he does it twice he does it more easily; if he goes on doing it he will end by doing it without thinking at all. His sensitiveness to sin is gone; his heart is hardened. It is indeed true that the most awful thing about sin is exactly its power to beget sin. (Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series. The Westminster Press) or The New Daily Study Bible New Testament - Logos

NIDNTT adds that...

Originally both aisthanomai and ginosko referred to experiencing an object through the senses. But whereas aisthesis and its cognates expressed physical apprehension through the senses apart from the intellectual act of interpretation, ginosko and its cognates included from the very first the idea of grasping and understanding the object perceived by the mind. Owing largely though not exclusively to the usage of the LXX, aisthanomai came to be confined to perception by the senses. (Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan)

Although aisthesis is used only here in the NT, there are 23 uses in the Septuagint (LXX) (Ex 28:3; Pr 1:4, 7, 22; 2:3, 10; 3:20; 5:2; 8:10; 10:14; 11:9; 12:1, 23; 14:6f, 18; 15:7, 14; 18:15; 19:25; 22:12; 23:12; 24:4). Note the predominance of uses in Proverbs. It is not surprising that Wisdom literature would have most of the Scriptural uses on discernment! For example, Solomon writes that the proverbs are written in part...

To give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge (LXX = aisthesis = discernment) and discretion (Proverbs 1:4)

"How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge (LXX = aisthesis = discernment)? (Proverbs 1:22)

Aisthesis represents a moral action of recognizing distinctions and making a decision about behavior. Discernment selects, classifies, and applies what is furnished by knowledge. It means to have the capacity to perceive clearly. It describes the ability to understand the real nature of something and once discriminating to make the proper moral decision.

Hebrews has the sole NT use of the related word aistheterion refers to the organs or senses of perception...

solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses (aistheterion) trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14) (Comment: The mature believer in the spiritual realm has discernment about what is right and wrong, true and false, helpful and harmful, righteous and unrighteous).

Luke has the sole NT use of the root verb aisthanomai recording that they (Jesus’ disciples) did not understand this statement (“the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men”), and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive (aisthanomai) it; and they were
afraid to ask Him about this statement. (Luke 9:45)

John Eadie explains that

The apostle's desire was that the love of the Philippians might acquire a profounder knowledge, and not be tempted to misplace itself, and that it might attain a sharper and clearer discernment, and so be prevented from being squandered on unworthy subjects, or directed to courses of conduct which had the semblance but not the reality of Christian rectitude and utility. If love grew in mere capacity, and without the increase of these safeguards, it was in hazard of forming unworthy and profitless attachments. Passion, without such guides or feelers, is but blind predilection. aœFellowship for the Gospelâ€”(Php 1:5KJV-note - koinonia in the Gospel) is still the thought in the apostle's mind, and that love which had led them to it, needed for its stability a deeper knowledge of the truths which characterized the gospel, and required for its development a clearer faculty of apprehending the character of the men best qualified, and the measures best adapted to its aœdefence and confirmation.Â”

One of the sure marks of maturity is discerning love. This goal speaks of sensitive moral perception, and a quickness of ethical tact. How often we saints mean to be loving to others, and say the wrong words or do the wrong thing. We lack that delicate sensibility that ability to express ourselves correctly, that gentle, wise, discriminating touch which would convey the love we have in our hearts to the lives of others. But this can be ours if we but live in close companionship with the One who always exhibited that sense of delicate tactfulness in His life. While it is true that we must approach the Word of God with an open mind, we also must recognize that Godâ€™s truth provides absolute boundaries for that openness.

Paul was praying that their self sacrificial love produced in yielded hearts by the Holy Spirit might overflow like a river in flood-time whose powerful waters needed to be brought within limits (cp "real knowledge and all discernment") lest it work harm rather than bring blessing.

R J Morgan writes that...

Paul prayed for this love to aœboundâ€”not a one-time overflowing, but a continual activity (Ro 5:5-note). This is an others-centered love. It looks for needs in the lives of others and seeks to meet those needs with no thought of returned favors. This love is also characterized by knowledge and discernment. Many people today want to focus on love with no discernment. From their perspective, love means tolerance, accepting anyone and everything, like the song that says, aœI donâ€™t want to be right.â€ But love must be based on truth” (Morgan, R. J. Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook: 2002. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers)

G. K. Chesterton spoke to a believer's need love that is discerning when he wrote,

Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

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Harry A. Ironside - DISCERNING LOVE - Lack of discernment often accounts for the failure of those in the pew to realize the full import of unsound teaching from the pulpit.

A brilliant modernistic preacher, who had pleased his audience with flowery oratory and beautiful perorations, as he discoursed glibly of the importance of breadth of view and the danger of bigoted opinions, was bidding farewell to his congregation as he was about to leave them for a new parish. One of his young men approached him and said, "Pastor, I am sorry we are losing you. Before you came I was one who did not care for GOD, man, or the devil, but through your delightful sermons, I have learned to love them all!" This is mere sentimentality -- not discerning love

WANTED:
CHRISTIANS LIVING
"AMPLIUS" LIVES

AMPLIUS LIVES - It is said that one day Michelangelo entered his studio to examine the work of his students. As he came to the painting of one of his favorite pupils, he stood and looked at it for a long time. Then, to the
utter surprise of the class, he suddenly took a brush and wrote one word across the canvas. That one word he splashed on the picture was amplius, meaning "larger." Michelangelo was not rejecting the work, for it exhibited great skill and was good as far as it went. But the small size of the canvas had made its design appear cramped. It needed to be expanded.

The Lord may have to write the word amplius across many of our lives. Our spiritual outlook becomes confined, and our vision of what God wants to do in and through us gets restricted by our small faith and limited spiritual growth (and limited spiritual vision). He wants to increase the dimensions of our spiritual lives (and the spiritual vision of our hearts), widen our outreach, and strengthen our witness.

OUR LIMITED VISION

needs
CONTINUAL RE-VISION!

A W Pink's exposition - The petition. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" or "sense."

Paul not only prayed for these saints, but he acquainted them with the particular things he requested for them, so that they might know what they should ask for and earnestly strive after. In like manner, his prayer is placed on permanent record in the Word that saints in all generations might be similarly instructed. If we would ascertain our special spiritual needs, if we would be better informed of the specific things we most need to ask for, then we should pay more than ordinary attention to these prayers of the apostle.

We should fix them in our minds, meditating frequently on them, begging God to open to us their spiritual meaning, and to effectually impress our hearts with the same. There is nothing provincial or evanescent about these prayers, for they are suited to and designed for Christians of all ages, places, and cases.

There is a wealth of heavenly treasure in them which no expositor can exhaust, and which the Holy Spirit will reveal to humble, earnest, seeking souls.

Those Philippian saints already loved God and His Christ, His cause, and His people, yet the apostle prayed that their love might "abound yet more and more"....The more we discern the grace of God at work in an individual Christian or church, the greater encouragement we have to make request that a still larger measure of it may be communicated to him or them.

LOVE...
BUBBLING UP

Goodwin pointed out that the Greek word here used for "abound" is a metaphor taken from the bubbling up and flowing of a spring of water, and showed the force and appropriateness of it. A spring flows naturally and spontaneously, and not by the mechanical efforts of men. Such is divine love in the soul: it operates freely and not by constraint, it works readily, and requires no urging from without. Where Christ is known to the soul, the heart cannot help being drawn out unto Him and delighting in Him.

"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1Th 4:9).

No one can be made to love one another, but where there is love it will act freely and readily.

As you take from a fountain, still more comes. As a spring does not keep its water to itself, so love keeps nothing to itself, but it flows out for the use and benefit of others. Love is selfless: its very nature is to give, seeking to promote the glory of God and the good of men. As fountains have their rise in hills, so love is first in Godâ€™s heart in heaven. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1John 4:19).

To the phrase "that your love may yet abound," or spring up and flow forth, the apostle added "yet more and more." God can never have enough of our love, nor us of His grace. If we would receive an enlargement of love we must be more and more engaged with its Object.

REAL KNOWLEDGE
Love to Be Informed and Controlled by the Truth - It is painful to witness sincere and affectionate believers making mistakes and falling into wrong courses through lack of light, yet there are many such cases. A wrongly instructed and injudicious Christian causes trouble among his fellow Christians, and often increases the reproaches of the world. Paul here prayed for an intelligent affection in the saints, for a warm heartedness based upon and flowing from an enlarged perception of divine things, that they might have a clear apprehension of the just claims of God and of their brothers and sisters in Christ. The world says that love is blind, but the love of the Christian should be enlightened, well instructed, and directed in all its exercises, effects, and manifestations by the Scriptures. Unless love is regulated by an enlarged and exact knowledge of the Word, and by that good judgment which is the result of matured discernment and experience, it soon degenerates into fanaticism and unwise exertions. An affectionate regard for our brethren is to be far more than a mere sentiment, namely, "love in the truth" (2Jn 1:1), love informed and controlled by the truth.

Some Christians have a good understanding of the truth yet are considerably carnal in their walk (1Co 3:1, 2, 3). Others, though defective in knowledge and unsettled in the faith, are yet warmhearted, having much zeal toward God and His cause, and a considerable command over their passions. Godâ€™s people should labor for both. It was love and zeal for Christ which prompted the apostles to say, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias [Elijah] did?" when they saw how their Master was slighted. Yet it was misdirected love and zeal, as His "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Lk 9:54, 55) showed. Love must be instructed if it is to be placed on legitimate objects and restrained from non permissible ones, if it is to be rightly exercised on all occasions. And the needed instruction can be obtained only from Godâ€™s Word. Only as love is regulated by light, and light is accompanied by and infused with love, are we well balanced.

ALL JUDGMENT

"That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Something more than bare knowledge, even though it is a knowledge of the Word, is needed if love is to be duly regulated and exercised. That something is here termed "judgment," or in the margin, "sense." (Ed: or "all discernment") That word occurs in the singular number nowhere else in the New Testament, and only once (Heb 5:14) in its plural form, where it is rendered "senses." In Youngâ€™s Analytical Concordance to the Bible it is defined as "perfection, sense, intelligence." Not only do we need to be thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures. If we are to make proper use of such knowledge, then good judgment is required in the governing of our affections and the ordering of our affairs.

Our Love to Abound in Knowledge - Many are wise in the general principles and in the letter of the Word, but err grievously in the applying of those principles in detail. There is a vast variety of circumstances in our lives. These call for much prudence in dealing with them aright. If our hearts are to be properly governed and our ways suitably ordered, much instruction and considerable experience are required. Besides a knowledge of Godâ€™s will, the spirit of discretion is needed. There are times when all lawful things are not expedient, and wisdom is indispensable to determine when those times and where those places are, as well as by which persons they may be used or performed. Indiscretion and folly remain in the best of us. The chief work of our judgment is to perceive what is proper for the time, the place, the company where we are, that we may order our behavior aright (Ps. 50:23); that we may know how to conduct ourselves in all relations civil and sacred, in work or in recreation; that we may conduct ourselves wisely as husbands, fathers, wives, or children; as employers or employees. Love needs to be directed by good judgment in all its exercises and expressions. (Prayer for Discerning Love)

Philippians 1:10 so that you may approve (PAN) the things that are excellent (PAPNPA), in order to be (2PPAS) sincere and blameless until the day of Christ (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: οις εις το δοκιμασειν (PAN) ημας τα διαφεροντα, (PAPNPA) εις ετε (2PPAS) οιληκρινεις και απροσκοποι εις ομοραν Χριστου,

Amplified: So that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value [recognizing the highest and the best, and distinguishing the moral differences], and that you may be untainted and pure and unerring and blameless [so that with hearts sincere and certain and unsullied, you may approach] the day of Christ [not stumbling nor causing others to stumble].

KJV: That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;
NLT: For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns. (NLT - Tyndale House)

Phillips: I want you to be able always to recognise the highest and the best, and to live sincere and blameless lives until the day of Jesus Christ. I want to see your lives full of true goodness, produced by the power that Jesus Christ gives you to the praise and glory of God. (Phillips: Touchstone)

Weymouth: so that you may be men of transparent character, and may be blameless, in preparation for the day of Christ,

Wuest: So that you may after testing, recognize the true value of the finer points of Christian conduct and thus sanction them, in order that you may be pure and not a stumbling block, keeping in view the day of Christ, (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: so that you may be men of transparent character, and may be blameless, in preparation for the day of Christ,

SO THAT YOU MAY APPROVE: eis to dokimazein (PAN) humas: (You - Isa 7:15; 16 Am 5:14; 15 Mic 3:2; Jn 3:20; Ro 2:18; 7:16, 22; 8:7; Ro 12:2, 9) (approve Job 12:11; 34:3; 2Co 11:13, 14, 15; Ep 5:10; 1Th 5:21; He 5:12, 5:13 14; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 2:2)

So that (eis) is a preposition of motion which literally means toward or into. When eis is used to describe a result, effect, consequence, it marks that which a person inclines toward or becomes (in this case a person with such a increasing knowledgeable and discerning love is becoming one who can continually test and approve things as genuine - see below). Whenever you see a "so that", pause and ponder "so what?" You may be surprised at how much greater insight the Spirit will give you when you prayerfully take time to interrogate terms of conclusion with the 5W/H questions!

PRAYING FOR DISCERNMENT
PURSUING AFTER DISCERNMENT

While Paul is praying for discernment here in Php 1:9-10, in his letter to the Romans Paul commands the saints (and us) to be pursuing after discernment...

And do not be conformed (suschematizo in the present imperative + negative = stop living like this implying some were already making choices that were causing them to be conformed) to this world, but be transformed (metamorphoo in the present imperative = Make it the habit of your life to continually allow yourself to be changed outwardly [in other words continually seek to surrender your will to the Spirit's will] as a reflection from and truly representative of your inward character and nature. Paul is commanding us to continually be going/growing in that direction, [ever increasing degrees of Christ-likeness] and is not calling for perfection. How does this growth transpire?) by the renewing (anakainosis = cause your mind, now positionally the mind of Christ in all believers, to become experientially new. Paul is calling for a renovation which makes a saint different than he or she was before Christ came into their life,) of your mind, that you may prove (same verb used in Php 1:10 = dokimazo; the present tense = continuous action) what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:2-note)

Comment: According to 2Corinthians 3:18-note for believers, the process of transformation (being "metamorphosed", so to speak, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit from a "spiritual caterpillar" to a "spiritual butterfly") is already underway in this life (we "are being transformed from glory to glory") as we behold God's Word (Are you daily in His Word of Truth that the persistent bombardment of your mind with the lies from the the world, the flesh and the devil, might be countered and "trumped" by the Truth of God? See Mt 4:4, 1Pe 2:2-note, Job 23:12-note). Romans 12:2 describes the ongoing process (present tense) by which we as believers are to daily be experiencing a change of character and conduct (Does your conduct match your character? Check your conduct for a good "barometer" of your character!) as a result of the renewal of our thinking. Wuest translates â€œchange your outward expression to one that comes from within and is representative of your inner being, by the renewing of your mind." Dear brother and sister in Christ, we must daily encourage one another (Heb 3:13) to fight the good fight of faith (1Ti 6:12) for the glory and praise of our great and mighty God, and we must not allow ourselves to let our thinking and our conduct be patterned after the spirit of this present evil age! Remember that there is no "neutral gear" in the Christian life - you are either being conformed to this world today or being transformed into a greater degree of Christ-likeness. God will not force us but He will enable us and part of the "empowerment" is to pray prayers like Phil 1:9-11 for one another. I have just prayed that for all of you who are reading this note (reciprocation greatly appreciated!). May God be greatly glorified in and through the lives of His children who are growing in their ability to approve the things that are excellent. Amen.