
360 Degree Thinking

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— Keith R. Blades

It is one of the newer buzzwords in the business and investment communities. *360 Degree Thinking*, we are told, is what is needed in today's economy and with today's financial climate. Business people, financial planners, and investors, can no longer afford to have a narrow field of vision and thinking regarding their involvement in either the marketplace or the world of investing. A narrow field of vision and thinking may have been suitable and even prudent in the past, but now it is a global economy with which we have to do. And a global economy necessitates a wide field of vision and thinking as a minimum requirement, with extended peripheral vision being even better. Yet the best of all is to be able to see all around you and to consider all business and investment options; to possess 360 Degree vision and thinking. With such thinking one looks at, perceives, and wisely responds to the business and investment potential in all the available markets. And so it goes.

Now the expression *360 Degree Thinking* may be one of the newer buzzwords, but the basic concept that it describes is not new at all. A number of words in our English language take the basic concept into account in their respective meanings and uses, such as comprehension and comprehensive; encyclopedic; all-inclusive; all-encompassing; and the like. In fact not only is the concept not new, but it is also something that God has purposed should characterize us in this present dispensation of His grace. He has made provision for this to be so, and therefore it is something that we ought to possess. Hence *360 Degree Thinking* should really be 'old hat' to us. Of course we are not talking about us having such thinking in the field of business and investing,

nor in any other mundane field of knowledge or activity. But rather with us such thinking pertains to the greatest field of knowledge and understanding that there is — the knowledge and understanding of the fully revealed plan and purpose of God. The *whole purpose of God* has now been set before us to understand and appreciate. And as such we certainly ought to have thinking that is commensurate with it.

The Mystery of God's Will

As incredible as it may seem at first, we really do have the privilege of comprehending *the whole purpose of God*. As Paul declares unto us in Ephesians 1, in view of God "having made known unto us the mystery of his will" we indeed have been privileged with the ability to think all-inclusively about what God is doing in the outworking of His plan and purpose.

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

Ephesians 1:8-10

As is evident from what Paul says in these verses, "the mystery of (God's) will" is not a reference to God's will in the details of our individual lives. Instead it is the issue of God now revealing something that He has determined to accomplish in His plan and purpose, but that He had formerly

not made known, having kept it a secret unto Himself. And because He had not made it known, God's whole purpose therefore was not made known. But now that God has made it known, we are now in possession of the full knowledge of what He has purposed to accomplish in Christ Jesus our Lord. And having now made it known, we can now understand, appreciate, and delight with Him in this revelation of "the mystery of his will."

What Has Now Been Made Known

Specifically God has now disclosed that the earthly realm is not the only realm to be reconciled unto Himself through Christ. The heavenly places will also be reconciled, with "the dispensation of the fulness of times" seeing both realms gathered together in one in Christ. In connection with providing for this, Paul goes on to teach us about the working of God's "mighty power,"...

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

Ephesians 1:20-21

We are now given to understand that through Christ's victorious death and resurrection from the dead God the Father has been able to put all the governmental authorities under the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, including all the ones in the heavenly places as well. For which cause Christ now bears the title, "the head of all principality and power." (Colossians 2:10) And as such in His day the Lord will not only reconcile the earthly realm unto Himself, but the heavenly one as well.

What Formerly Had Been Known

Through the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began, God had set forth and described His plan for the reconciling of the earth unto Himself. The reality of this He had never kept secret, with the nation of Israel being created by God for this very purpose. God's covenanted program with Israel pertains to the reconciling of the earth, with the Lord Jesus Christ functioning as the Son of man and the Son of David to provide for reconciling it back to God. And so as the Psalmist declares, in connection with fulfilling the mandates of the Davidic Covenant the Father would declare His Son to be, "*my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." (Psalm 89:27) The dominion of the earth would be restored to God through Christ, with all things on the earth put under His feet.

However when God unexpectedly suspended His program with Israel, raised up Paul to be His brand new apostle, and revealed to him "the mystery of Christ," God disclosed His formerly-kept-secret plan for reconciling unto Himself the heavenly places as well. As Paul teaches us in Colossians 1, "it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell," and hence it pleased the Father for Christ to be "the firstborn of every creature," not just "*my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Wherefore in this dispensation we are privileged to understand more about God's purpose in Christ than had been known before. It has been given unto us to know, understand, and appreciate God's full purpose "in Christ."

Therefore having made known unto us “the mystery of His will,” God indeed has unveiled what *the whole of His plan and purpose* is composed of, and what it will result in. What had once been “hid in God,” He has now made known. That “which was kept secret since before the world began” now has been disclosed and made manifest. Hence we truly are in the position of being able to comprehend *the whole purpose of God*.

All Wisdom and Prudence

However the revelation of “the mystery of (God’s) will” not only allows us to comprehend the whole purpose of God in general or in principle, but to also do so “in all wisdom and prudence.” A basic or superficial understanding, therefore, is not what God has designed for us to have. Rather He has designed for us actually to be mutual counselors together with Him in our comprehension. As such this means that He desires us to possess with Him a keen understanding and appreciation for His genius and wisdom in how He has gone about working out His purpose so far. He wants us to realize why He has done things the way in which He has, (including His reason for having kept the “mystery of Christ” a mystery), and likewise to appreciate the depth of His wisdom in all that He has done. Along with this He desires us to also have an insightful understanding of how the outworking of His purpose in Christ all works out to the praise of His glory, and for the riches of His glory, especially in “the dispensation of the fulness of times.”

Consequently we are not only privileged with knowing what the whole purpose of God is, but also we are privileged with being able to appreciate each and every facet of God’s incomparable wisdom in the outworking of it; from that which has taken place in “time past,” to what is taking place “now” in this present dispensation, to what will yet take place in “the ages to come.” Such is the honor bestowed upon

us as ones to whom God has abounded “in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will.”

A More Excellent Expression

Now in view of the scope of this privilege, the popular expression *360 Degree Thinking* really isn’t fully suitable for us to use. It doesn’t precisely describe the extent or range of the thinking and understanding that God has designed for us to have. In truth it is both deficient and insufficient in its meaning. So though it comes close, it won’t do for us.

Amazingly enough there really is an expression that denotes a better kind of thinking; one which is even more extensive and more comprehensive; one which is commensurate with “all wisdom and prudence” and so more excellent than the 360 Degree kind. For the moment, to give it a name which denotes its more excellent nature, let’s call it *Full or Total Dimensional Thinking*. And this truly is an appropriate designation, for this is just the kind of thinking and understanding one possesses when he knows and comprehends “what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.”

The Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and Height

In Ephesians 3:14–21 the apostle Paul once again deals with the issue of the kind of thinking and comprehension that God has designed for us to have. And he does so as he intelligently prays for those things that pertain to us being “filled with all the fulness of God.” In this prayer Paul sets forth four particular issues belonging both to our inner-man and to the full maturity of our edification. Each of them is vitally important and each is essential to us when it comes to us being “filled with all the fulness of God.” However for our particular purpose it is the third of the four issues that especially concerns us.

17b ...; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what
 is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

Ephesians 3:17b-18

Though there is nothing difficult about the meaning of each of the individual terms of dimension Paul speaks of, unfortunately often times the meaning to be derived from putting them together in the collective expression “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” is not understood and appreciated.

When you think about it, it takes the collective knowledge of these four dimensions in order to fully or wholly measure, describe, and define an object when it is viewable from all its sides, including from on top and from underneath. The expression has its roots in the field of mathematics, especially geometry. The four measurements were used to indicate that an object had been fully measured and wholly examined. It had been viewed and studied from all sides, including top and bottom. It was, therefore, completely understood and described. Nothing was missing.

The expression, however, readily moved out of the field of mathematics and into common use. Hence speaking about knowing “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of something became a way of talking about having a complete knowledge and understanding of it. It referred to being fully acquainted with all sides, facets, or features, pertaining to some issue. As with a physically measurable object, if you know its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” then none of its sides or surfaces have been hidden from your view, or gone unnoticed or unexamined by you. No surface has been unexplored, or ignored. No angle of view has been overlooked; no dimension unmeasured, or thought to be unimportant. Instead, every side or surface of the object has been closely looked at. It has been turned every which way in your hands so that each surface can be viewed and studied.

Each dimension of the object has been measured and considered, as it is turned over in the hands. And this results in the object being fully known and understood by you, which also allows you to fully describe and define the object to others.

Moreover the expression also denotes that such complete knowledge of an object or subject puts you on intimate terms with it. You are so familiar with it that it is not only at home in your thoughts, but it can be the delight of your thoughts; especially of both the musings and contemplative activity of your mind. And when the subject happens to be the counsel of another person’s will, (as it is with us and the knowledge of God’s will), and you comprehend “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of it, then you truly are in the position of being a mutual counsellor together with that person in the outworking of what he has planned and purposed to do. You can knowledgeably follow what he is doing; perceiving his ingenuity and discerning his wisdom.

An Illustration

A good sample and instructive illustration of the use of this expression can be found in the writings of Charles Dickens. For example in his novel *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens describes the intimate knowledge that a certain Secretary has concerning the personal, family, and business dealings of his employer, a man by the name of Mr. Boffin, also referred to as the Golden Dustman. As Dickens relates,...

“The Secretary lost no time in getting to work, and his vigilance and method soon set their mark on the Golden Dustman’s affairs. His earnestness in determining to understand the length and breadth and depth of every piece of work submitted to him by his employer, was as special as his dispatch in transacting it. He accepted no information or explanation at second hand, but made himself the master of everything confided to him.

One part of the Secretary’s conduct, underlying all the rest, might have been mistrusted by a man with a better knowledge of men than the Golden Dustman had. The Secretary was as far from being inquisitive or intrusive as Secretary could be, but nothing less than a complete understanding of the whole of the affairs would content him.”¹

Though Dickens uses an abbreviated form of the expression, he makes it clear just what it means when you speak of someone knowing or understanding “the length and breadth and depth” of something. The issue is one of having comprehensive knowledge; thorough and complete knowledge; knowledge and understanding that provides one with a mastery of a subject, including the implications and ramifications of it. To be exact and to the point it is just as Dickens says, it is “a complete understanding of the whole of the affairs.” And so it is.

However, as has already been pointed out, such a complete understanding also puts you on intimate terms with the subject. It has taken a grip on you, so to speak, and it becomes the object of your thoughts. An intimacy develops which makes you one with the subject that you know so well. Hence Dickens went on to further describe how that this too characterized Mr. Boffin’s Secretary.

“On the other hand, the Secretary was discerning, discreet, and silent, though as zealous as if the affairs had been his own. He showed no love of patronage or command of money, but distinctly preferred resigning both to Mr. Boffin. If, in his limited sphere, he sought power, it was the power of knowledge; the power derivable from a perfect comprehension of his business.”²

This, once again, is the kind of comprehensive, full dimensional thinking and knowledge that is involved in knowing “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” Though the character in Dickens’ story had unscrupulous motives behind his desire for knowing the whole of his employer’s affairs, for having “perfect comprehension of his business,” it still clearly shows that this is what the expression conveys.

With us, however, as Paul sets forth in Ephesians, the issue is one of us having a complete understanding and appreciation for *the whole of God’s affairs*. It is the issue of us comprehending the full plan and purpose of God “in Christ,” now that God has made known “the mystery of Christ.” And it is the issue of us being on intimate terms with it. Having it being the delight of our thinking, as it is of God’s thinking. Knowledgeably perceiving and rejoicing over each aspect of God’s “manifold wisdom,” as we study and contemplate the outworking of His “eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord,” and do so “in all wisdom and prudence.”

The Whole of God’s Affairs

Once again, as incredible as it may seem we really do have the privilege of being able to understand and appreciate *the whole of God’s affairs*. It really is something that God has granted unto us in this present dispensation of His grace.

Naturally, therefore, we ought to be zealous to “comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” We ought to be ones who in this one respect emulate Dickens’ character, by being ones with whom ‘nothing less than a complete understanding of the whole of God’s affairs would content us.’ — *K. R. Blades*

¹ *Our Mutual Friend*, by Charles Dickens: Book The First, Chapter 16.

² *Ibid.*