

“Be Not Foolish, But Understand ...”

“what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit ...” (Eph. 5:17f). When Paul enjoins that these Ephesians not be foolish but understand the will of God, it is evident he has in mind his previous instructions that they were to put off wickedness and to put on godliness. In the midst of those commands he implored, *“Let no man deceive you with empty words”* (5:6) so his instructions they were not to be foolish builds upon the command they not be deceived with empty words. It is needful that we be pure in heart, in body and in tongue. To think we can be otherwise and still attain heaven is to be foolish, indeed.

The need for Christians to sanctify themselves was ever on Paul’s mind. There is scarcely a letter which came from his pen that does not make an appeal for sanctification on the part of those to whom the letter was written. In what was likely his first letter (First Thessalonians) he wrote, *“This is the will of God, even your sanctification”* (1 Thess. 4:3). In his second letter to Corinth, he gave five contrasts, emphasizing the necessity that God’s people keep a clear distinction between themselves and the world. He reminded them there can be no fellowship between righteousness and iniquity; no communion between light and darkness; no concord between Christ and Be-lial; no portion between a believer and unbeliever; no agreement between a temple of God and idols. Thus, because God has promised to dwell in us and walk in us, to be our God and we His people, He demands, *“Wherefore, come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord”* (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

The significance of his words *“but understand what the will of the Lord is”* must not be overlooked. The phrase is a command and because it is, it is clear that we can understand what the Lord’s will is! Many deny this. They think that the Bible cannot be understood. That is not true. God would not have demanded we understand His will were it impossible that we could do so. Several passages illuminate this subject. *“And ye shall seek for me and ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”* (Jer. 29:13). Jesus said, *“If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching whither it is of God or whether I speak of myself”* (Jn. 7:17). Yes, there are things hard to be understood (2 Pet. 3:16). Yes, there is milk for the babe and meat for the mature (1 Cor. 3:2). But, we can understand! There is no excuse for one to say “I don’t understand.” If we don’t understand, it isn’t because God hasn’t made His word sufficiently clear: the problem lies with us.

And thus the apostle adds, "*And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit.*" Does the apostle intend a "play on words": viz, "Be not filled with 'spirits' but be filled with 'Spirit'"? Perhaps not. If, however, he is not making a "play on the word 'spirits,'" it is clear that the effects might apparently be the same. Scoffers said of the apostles on Pentecost, "*these men are filled with new wine*" (Acts 2:13). But, how were the Ephesians to be filled with the Spirit? Were they to experience the same thing as seen on Pentecost? No. "*Be filled with the Spirit*" is a command and a command is something which demands deliberate obedience. Who could deliberately determine to be filled with the Spirit such as at Pentecost? One can deliberately be filled with wine, but no one can deliberately be filled with the Spirit such as the apostles were. So, what explanation is to be offered? Just this. The parallel passage to Ephesians 5:19 is Colossians 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." I can obey this command. One can emulate the instructions of Christ's words so that one becomes filled with His word: the word is evident in my words, my deeds, yes, and even in my thoughts. And, when the word of Christ dwells richly (fully) in me, I am therein and thereby filled with the Spirit for by obeying the command to let the word of Christ dwell richly in me, I am obeying the command to be "*filled with the Spirit*"!

Jim McDonald