

Sermon for August 26, 2012 – 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 5:15-20

Theme: Understand the will of the Lord.

- 1) *The days are evil.*
- 2) *Be filled with the Spirit.*

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know what the Lord's will is for you?

Today we are going to consider this questions and its importance, under theme: **Understand the will of the LORD** *for the days are evil, so be filled with the Spirit.*

Part One: The days are evil.

Our sermon text begins: ¹⁵ *Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity.*

Be careful how you live, dear Christian. Think before you speak and act. Why? *Because the days are evil.* Need proof? Pick up a paper or turn on the news. God's judgment is coming upon this earth because of sin. Every day that passes just brings us closer to that dreadful day.

But does God find pleasure in judging the world? Does he want to send countless people to hell? Absolutely not! *"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways."* (Ezekiel 33:11) God is so serious about not wanting anyone to die eternally that *he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

And it is this love God has for the lost that saved you. You see, you were once *dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and . . . the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3) who craved evil. We lived selfishly and were on our merry way to hell. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. . . ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-10)

Jesus saved us from our sin. How? First of all by living the perfect life God demanded of us but that we all failed to live. Through faith in Christ, God counts Jesus' righteousness as our righteousness. And why? Because when Christ hung on the cross God reckoned our sin as Jesus' sin! We have been saved, not only from the hell that threatened us, but from the sin that entangled us. We have been saved – not only for heaven, but , as dearly loved children, God wants us to be lights in this sinful world- drawing attention to Christ and his salvation.

This is why St. Paul encourages you to be careful how you live. God has chosen you to be his representative to this sinful world. He has chosen you to be his mouthpiece – calling your family, friends and neighbors to repentance and faith. He has chosen you to be different, to stand out, to be a light in this sin darkened world that people *may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16)

So make the most of every opportunity. Do not ask how I can spend my time and energy serving myself, but how I can serve my LORD by being a faithful husband or wife, an honest employer or employee, a loving parent or child, etc. . . . The days are evil. The devil's armies surround us. Some of our friends and relatives are trapped in the devil's dungeon, and we have the Gospel, the light that will lead them to freedom.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. What is the LORD's will? I can tell you what it isn't. It isn't living selfishly - spending every free dollar and using every free minute for your own leisure and entertainment. It isn't holding grudges or gossiping about your neighbor - even if what you say is "true." It isn't excusing yourself from worship or Bible class because you feel that you can grow your faith better on your own. This is all foolishness.

What is the Lord's will? That you realize and confess the magnitude of your sinfulness, and rejoice in the fact that God - in spite of your sin - chose and saved you to be his own dearly loved child. His love is so great that he sacrificed his own son for you! The LORD's will is that you believe in him and his work of redemption; and live a God pleasing life as a result of this. God *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*, (1Timothy 2:4), and he wants you to confess this truth by your words and actions.

Understand who you are in Christ and the Lord's desire to save the lost; and let this understanding rule your life.

Part Two: Be filled with the Spirit.

Our text continues: *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

The abuse of alcohol was a problem in Paul's day just as much as it is in our own! Why do people drink excessively? Is it not to escape, to feel good, to avoid the problems and troubles of life? And yet excessive drinking has never solved a single problem. It compounds them. Excessive drinking is a sin that can easily lead to others - including a loss of faith.

But Paul's warning is not just against physical drunkenness, he is also warning against the many drinks that the world offers, which numb our senses to the spiritual dangers that surround us. The world tells us to get drunk on the beer of self-indulgent shopping, or the wine of excessive leisure. Slam down the hard shots of pornography or sex outside of marriage to satisfy your loneliness and desire for love. But do any of these drinks, and the countless others like them, actually help? No. They make us drunk with sinful pleasures and only add to our problems. They may numb our feelings for a while, but they will inevitably lead to a hangover of guilt, which we will be tempted to numb by drinking in even more sinful pleasure. If this is left unchecked, we become an addict - addicted to his sin - trying to find joy in it instead of in Christ. Then we find ourselves in danger of forgetting Christ, losing our faith and dying eternally.

If you find yourself in such a cycle - and who of us haven't at one point or another - please repent and ask God for forgiveness and help! Do not continue to drink the wine the world to offer you, it only leads to further sin! Rather, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let Him be the source of your joy and the solution to all your problems. And where do you find Him? In God's Word that you daily meditate on through personal and family devotions, or that you listen to and discuss in worship and Bible Class. The Spirit fills you as you partake of the LORD's Supper, uniting you to each other and reassuring you of your forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice. He is with you as you meditate on your baptism, how God has adopted you into his family and what this means for you now and in eternity. God fills your hearts with the Spirit when he fills you ears and eyes and your tongue and touch with the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

And what does being filled with the Spirit lead to? The same thing alcohol does: singing with your friends. Only the songs sung by those filled with the Spirit are much better and please God's ear.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Martin Luther once said: "Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. . . . Next after theology, I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor. . . . My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues."

When the God's Word and promises are properly set to music – there is nothing more soothing and joyous for saddened and conflicted soul. My family is a singing family. When my grandmother was dying, my aunt and I literally sang her to sleep. After the funeral, my family encouraged each other with hymns, and most of our sadness was swept away as we sang. Singing hymns that spoke of Jesus and our salvation in Him gave us great hope and peace.

And where is a place where you will find Christians singing songs of Jesus love for us on a regular basis? Where can you find encouragement in Christ as you listen to the soul-soothing Gospel accompanied to music? Right here in worship! Take time to meditate on the words you sing in each hymn. Ponder on the message it offers you, and how it encourages you to find peace and forgiveness in Christ. If you do this, then worship will become all the more meaningful for you, as you make music in your heart to the Lord. Your singing will become more meaningful to the person sitting next to you, as he hears your heartfelt song and is encouraged with the Gospel you proclaim.

Do you understand what the LORD's will is concerning you? His will is to forgive you for Christ's sake and adopt you into his family by faith so that you will be saved. His will is that you receive this salvation in joy, and live your life as his dearly loved child – obedient to his words, so that, through your words and actions, the people of this world might know the love God has for them, and his desire for their salvation.

Therefore be careful how you live. Understand that the days are evil, so be filled with the Spirit by coming to Worship and encouraging each other with the Word. Amen.